



## BELIEVERS CHAPEL

6420 Churchill Way | Dallas, Texas | 75230 | t 972.239.5371 | believerschapeldallas.org

The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

The Local Church

“Its Organization, part I”

TRANSCRIPT

[AUDIO BEGINS]...carry on here. And therefore we felt it was very desirable in the future for us, twice a year, to have a series of about six or seven meetings with the new comers in which we would sit down with them, go through the organization and the scriptural documentation for it of Believers Chapel, and that we would do this for those who were coming in and becoming a part of the church but who have never had an opportunity to really hear why we do some of the things that we do. Why, for example, there is no pastor. Why, for a minor matter, why we don't take up the collection in the morning meeting. And various other things which you have noticed are, to put it as nicely as possible, unique in Believers Chapel.

But as we thought about it the idea of having a meeting twice a year, inviting new comers in, what about those who have already been here for a long time, no doubt you have acquired by conversation with people in Believers Chapel, some of the reasons why we do certain things but other reasons have escaped you, and it's our fault because we have not made it known. But being in a building such as this and having only one meeting in which we put our public foot forward, so to speak, we have felt -- at least I have felt and I think the elders concur in this -- that it's not a very good testimony to play with one string constantly. And so in the morning meeting, which is our only time in

which we should put our Christian testimony forward, we shouldn't talk about the church all the time. We should rather stress the things that the Bible stress, the things are - the salvation that we have through Jesus Christ and other great doctrines of the faith.

Now it's not that we do not think that the doctrine of the church is not a great doctrine, in a few moments you will see that I think it's very, very important, but if you have just one opportunity to let the public know what you think, what you are preaching and proclaiming it surely would be wrong for us to constantly harp on the organization of the local church, and so that is why we have not. Now for those of you who have been here from the beginning you'll remember that one of the first things that we did was to begin with an exposition of the Book of Acts and for one whole year in about forty messages we went through the Book of Acts and many of these things that we're going to talk about came up in the course of that exposition, but then we began with about twenty-five people five or six years ago. And even at the height of, or at the conclusion of that series I guess we didn't have a hundred people so, and some of them have moved out of town, some have left us, and consequently not a great many of you were actually there in those days.

So we thought that it would be good for us to look into the New Testament for a few Sundays and take the adult classes. And Mr. Bryant has offered his class and we welcome you into Bill McRae class for this series, and we would go through the local church and its organization, its practices, so that you would understand why we mean as we do in Believers Chapel. And we hope, of course, that you will be persuaded that this is what the Bible teaches.

Now let me say as I begin that I am not sure that everything that I say to you is in the spirit and accord with the truth but I believe it to be. There is a difference between what I believe to be and what I - when I get to heaven will discover to really be. And so I am not putting this forward in a dogmatic sense as this is absolutely true, there is no other alternative to anything that I say but I do hope that you will do as the Bereans did,

you will listen to what I say and listen with an open mind, and then that you will go home and open up the Bible for yourself and read it and study it. And if you perceive that this is what the Bible seems to teach then I think that what you should do is what every one of us should do about every doctrine; that is, we should obey it. That is, we should live in accordance with it. And we should not equivocate about it, we should go ahead and give our testimony to it and proceed to the carrying of it out. For if its God's truth, it will ultimately glorify Jesus Christ. And that, of course, is what every Christian would like to do. And I want to say right at the beginning, this is what we in Believers Chapel want to do above everything else to have Jesus Christ glorified through the ministry of the word and through the function of this local assembly of believers.

Now in the series, in case you're interested in the topics that I have chosen, the six topics -- I think we can confine it to six, if not we'll take seven -- but the topics that I have decided to deal with are these. First of all, the local church, its organization. Secondly, the local church, its spiritual gifts. Thirdly, the local church, its priesthood. Fourth, the local church, its ordinances. Fifth, the local church, its meetings and its ministry. And by ministry I mean its outreach as well. And finally, the local church, its discipline.

So today we want to for a few moments discuss the question of the local church and its organization and I am going to try my best to finish these messages at 10:35 which will allow us about ten minutes, at least five, of discussion because this is the way we hope to conduct these meetings with the new comers in the future. And we want to allow them a time to ask us pertinent questions and to get the answers to things that we overlook. I think this is particularly important for you because you may never have the opportunity to ask these questions again. And as they come to your mind write them down on a piece of paper and ask them afterwards. And if you don't get a chance to ask them afterwards come to me or to one of the elders and ask them privately. And I may

suggest this to you if it's a very, very difficult question ask two elders because you may get two answers [Laughter], and one may be more satisfactory than the other.

Now the local church, its organization, and just as a basis for what I am going to say today, and we will be referring to this passage again several times, I'm going to read 1st Timothy chapter 3 throughout. 1st Timothy chapter 3, verse 1 through verse 16.

Now you will recognize as we read this that the apostle is writing his apostolic legate, Timothy, and giving him instructions regarding the qualifications for elders or bishops and deacons. Verse 1, 1st Timothy 3,

“This is a true saying, if a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work. A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behavior, given to hospitality, apt to teach; Not given to wine, no striker, not greedy of filthy lucre; but patient, not a brawler, not covetous; One that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity; For if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God? Not a novice, lest being lifted up with pride he fall into the condemnation of the devil. Moreover he must have a good report of them which are without; lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil. Likewise must the deacons be grave, not double-tongued, not given to much wine, not greedy of filthy lucre; Holding the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience. And let these also first be proved; then let them use the office of a deacon, being found blameless. For so must their wives be grave, not slanderers, sober, faithful in all things. Let the deacons be the husbands of one wife, ruling their children and their own houses well. For they that have used the office of a deacon well purchase to themselves a good degree, and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus. These things write I unto thee, hoping to come unto thee shortly: But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth. And without controversy great is the mystery of

godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory.”

From a divine standpoint Genesis to Malachi is the age of the Father. Matthew through John is the age of the Son. And from the Book of Acts on through the epistles of the New Testament we have the age of the Holy Spirit.

Now this third age, the age of the Holy Spirit, from the human standpoint is the age of the church of Jesus Christ. For it is in this age that God is interested in the building up of the church. So that we live in the age of the church; the age of the church universal, the age of the church local.

Now let me distinguish the different meanings that have attached to the word church in the New Testament right at the beginning. The word church may refer to one universal body of believers, whether on earth or in heaven, who have been baptized by the Holy Spirit into a unity which is called the body of Christ. Therefore if you are a member of the body of Christ you have believed in Jesus Christ. And whether you are a Baptist or a Presbyterian or a Methodist or a member of Believers Chapel or some other independent church or even a Roman Catholic, if you have believed in Jesus Christ and you're trusting him entirely for your salvation you are a member of the one, holy Catholic church, the church universal.

Now the New Testament uses the term church in that sense. The New Testament also uses the term church in the sense of a group of local churches. That is, the apostle may refer to one particular locality or he may even refer to the church as it exists upon the earth at any particular time and call it the church. That is, the term then refers to a group of local churches who are looked at in their entirety, the church.

It may be that sense in which Paul uses the expression in verse 15, “But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth.” But there are

clearly instances in the Book of Acts in which the word is used in that sense. Paul, too, says that he persecuted the church. Now he means a specific body or bodies of believers that existed upon the earth, but he calls them the church. The group of local testimonies looked at as a group. Now, the term is used in that sense in the New Testament.

Then the term is used in the sense of a specific local church. A specific group of believers who meet in a particular geographical locality. For example, in 1st Thessalonians chapter 1, and verse 1, the apostle writes, “Paul, and Silvanus, and Timothy, unto the church of the Thessalonians which is in God the Father and in the Lord Jesus Christ.” The church of the Thessalonians. And again in the second epistle, “Paul and Silvanus, and Timotheus, unto the church of the Thessalonians.” In Colossians chapter 1, and verse 1, the Apostle Paul writes, “From Paul, n apostle by the Jesus Christ, by the will of God, and Timotheus our brother, to the saints and faithful brethren in Christ which are at Colosse.” Now the saints and the faithful brethren are the church in that locality.

So the word church is used of a single local church in some geographical locality. Now this means that there are many terms by which we designate church which are not biblical. For example, the word church is never used in the New Testament of a denomination. For example, if we were to say, “The Presbyterian church,” or, “The Baptist church,” by so doing we have used the term church in a sense in which it is not found in the New Testament.

The word church is not used of a building and when we look at a building we say, “That is the John Calvin Presbyterian Church,” we are using the term church in a sense in which it is not found in the New Testament. We may say, “The John Calvin Presbyterian Church meets in that building,” but that’s not the church, the building. And even in that other sense the John Calvin Presbyterian Church, we have wandered off a little from the biblical statements too. But the point I want to make is that the church is never used of a building.

The church is never used of a state church such as the Anglican Church, which means the Church of England. Or the Church of Scotland, the term is never used in that sense in the Bible. Now I'm mentioning these things not to get you stirred up because let me assure you that I don't have any real desire to attach any of these particular churches. In my younger days I'll admit at times I kind of enjoying doing that [Laughter] but I've grown too old to really get too interested in that type of thing any more.

But what I do want you to see is to see what the Bible teaches. And sometimes it is necessary for me to show you what the Bible does not teach so that you will understand more clearly what it does teach.

Now we're going to be concerned not with the church universal. In evangelical circles the church universal is stressed. In fact, I am so - I'm disturbed about this but it is stressed so much in evangelical circles that some of the activities of the local church are never even carried out for example, baptism. I know Christians who have been Christians for fifteen years who have never been baptized. They are members of evangelical churches in which the gospel is proclaimed. In which a great stress has been made and laid properly upon the church universal, but the church local truth has been sadly neglected and the result is ultimately a dishonor to our Lord Jesus Christ's glory.

Now we're going to be concerned with the local church which the New Testament is remarkably clear about which makes the confusion that exists even more difficult to understand. In fact, I have often made this statement and I think that it is true, it is safe to say that the doctrine of the church, the local church, in the New Testament is as clear as any important doctrine in the Bible.

This last week I was reading a book on ecclesiology and I ran across a statement which I firmly agree and I'm going to take the liberty of reading it to you, after all these things are going on tape and those who are sitting in the home Bible classes and listening to this by tape you won't care whether I'm reading or not. And so I'm going to read it.

And this is what the author says, and I've been saying this for a long time and I was so glad to see it in print. And I was a little ashamed to discover that it was written about a hundred years ago. “But shall we not have to concede that, (he's answering an objection,) the polity which was actually instituted is not as sharply defined as we must think it would have been had it been meant for a precise and final pattern. We answer, this depends upon the divine purpose in the revelation given. If God intended to strip the subject of all mystery so as to save us any study or questioning about the matter, we say yes we must concede. But if he intended study not merely of the word but of history and the philosophy of history to be a means of grace, if he intended we should comprehend church polities in their relations to human minds and to the dissemination and preservation of great fundamental truths, if he meant that we should sense the force of systems as well as work them we reply, no, the very warrant of definiteness or clearness may be an essential element in the divine scheme of training. All that can be said on this score can be alleged with, (and this is what I was interested in,) all that can be said on this score can be alleged with equal force on the subject of justification by faith, regeneration by the Spirit or the atonement itself.”

And he goes on to conclude, “Indeed the very character of Christ has drawn forth manifold more controversies than has the subject of church organization or government.” Now what I'm going to say is simply this, the New Testament teaching on the local church is clearer than the doctrine of justification by faith which I regard as imminently clear in the New Testament. I only have to mention this to you, have you ever had contact with anyone who believed baptism was necessary for salvation? Have you've ever been embarrassed by the fact that they immediately turn to Acts chapter 2, and verse 38, and Mark chapter 16, and Romans chapter 6, and 1st Peter chapter 3, and Acts chapter 22, and so on? And you have thought that the doctrine of justification by faith was so plain and clear that a baby could understand it?

Now I think you can see that if you look at these texts that to the minds of many the subject of justification by faith is not as clear as you regard it. And if we talk about other things the same is true. The church was rent from top to bottom by controversies over who was Jesus Christ in the early centuries? And all of the Christological controversies were in the past but we did not live then. We do not realize the great controversies and the turmoil that existed in the early church over such a fundamental thing as the person of Christ. We have no question today that he is the God-man, but that was a position that was fought out through controversy over centuries.

Therefore I say, and I think I say it without fear of any successful contradiction, that the church teaching in the New Testament is as clear as the teaching on justification by faith. And if we are willing to search it out and to study it we shall see for ourselves that it is imminently clear. I think that the importance of this subject should be obvious to you but I want to stress one thing today, and as we go along we will stress more, what is God doing in the present age? What is his activity?

Well as you read the New Testament I think it becomes very evident that the thing that God is doing is building a church. Jesus said in Matthew chapter 16, and verse 18, “Thou art Peter, and upon the rock of this confession, Peter, that you have just made I will build my church.”

Now I think that when our Lord stated this he was referring to the church primarily in its universal character, he would build his church. But the church universal exists as the church local in time. And therefore I think I can say, and again without any fear of successful contradiction, and the way I’m going to put this may upset some of you but remembered I’m trying to get over the truth, Jesus Christ is more interested in the local church than he is in Campus Crusade. Jesus Christ is more interested in the local church than he is in the InterVarsity Christian Fellowship. Jesus Christ is more interested in the local church than he is in Dallas Theological Seminary and so on.

Does that shock you? It should not. You do not find anything about these institutions that exist outside of local churches in the New Testament. You find the New Testament concern with the church of Jesus Christ. Now I'm not against Campus Crusade except insofar as it may be against the Scriptures. I am not against Dallas Theological Seminary except insofar as it may be against the Scriptures. I think every one of us who are associated with that institution should say the same thing from Dr. Walbert Down, and I think he would.

In other words, in the New Testament we have the plain statement that God is interested in the church, and he is working to build up a church. And the church exists as an entity in various places throughout the world. It's safe to say that his number one attention is given to the church. Now he's concerned with his believers everywhere, even when they wander from the fold. And if I should get out of fellowship with God he's still interested in me. But his primary interest is in what he has stated in his word to be his claim, a local church.

Therefore I think, and I hope you won't say that I'm trying to preach a church, I'm not, any particular church. And Believers chapel, the moment it gets out of the will of God I hope I'll be the first one to stand up and say, “I cannot agree with this.” The Scriptures teach this and I must follow the Scriptures. But it's very, very important that we realize that that is the stress of the divine heart and I thank God for everything he's done through Campus Crusade. As you know very often I've helped them as much as I can in the ministry of the word, my little gift for them. I'm very much interested in Intersociety Christian Fellowship and the other activities and surely in Dallas Theological Seminary. But God's primary interest is the church of Jesus Christ, that local church.

Now I just mention that, there's some other things we could say. Now first of all this morning, and we have just a few minutes, but I want to outline something then we'll have some discussion. The first question that might be asked, is the New Testament itself, does the New Testament itself, stress the fact of local church organization? In other

words, is it really true that there is a local church organization? Now you know, of course, that there have been at least three historical systems. There has been the Congregational form, which is the democratic form. There has been the Episcopal form, which is an autocratic form; not necessarily wrong because it's autocratic but it is autocratic. And there has been the Presbyterian form, which is a representative form of church government. Democratic, autocratic, representative, or Congregational, Episcopal, and Presbyterian; these are the three major forms of church organization. Authority in the case of the Congregational form exists in the congregation. They are the ultimate authority. In the case of the Episcopal form, authority rests in the bishop, in the diocese, or in the counsels of bishops in the general and final sense. In the Presbyterian form authority exists not in the local church nor in bishops, which they do not have, but in the presbytery, the local presbytery, above that the synod, and finally the general assembly which is the final authority.

Now we're going to look at the New Testament in the light of each one of these systems as we go along. I think it is proper for us to say that there is such a thing as organization in the churches, not organization of the churches, for there is no such thing of an organization of local churches in the New Testament. There was no outward form of organization between the church in Jerusalem and the church in Antioch. They had the fellowship that comes from similar viewpoints. And we have the fellowship that comes from similar viewpoints. We agree that every church insofar as it agrees with our understanding of the word of God. We disagree with every church insofar as it disagrees with our understanding of the word of God, that's natural. The Baptist church is the same way. Occasionally when I was pastor of another church we would write a letter, so and so from a Baptist church has joined our church and wanted us to write a letter. So we would write a letter and say such and such a person has united with our church, we would appreciate a letter to the effect that they were members in good standing. They would write back and say, “We are sorry, we cannot give you such a letter for you are not

a church of like faith and order with us.” Now we didn’t get made over that, I was rather happy that they had some convictions [Laughter]. They believed that their faith and their order was right, and they said that. I liked to have them say it but nevertheless they said it, and they would say the same thing that I’m saying.

Now when we think about organization then in the churches we are talking about organization within a local church, not an organization of churches, there is no such thing in the New Testament, nor is there an organization of the church in the sense of the church universal except that Jesus Christ as the head and we are the body and that pretty well settles it. What are the indications that there existed organization in the New Testament churches? Let me just state them. The churches had offices who cared for the ministry and the work of the church. The churches met at appointed times. The churches exercised discipline. The churches regulated their meetings. The meetings were to be decently done and in order. Certain prescriptions were laid down for the carrying out of the meetings. The churches collected and dispensed money. These factors plus others indicate that there was an organization in the churches. Perhaps you know that we must not stress it.

Secondly, what was the source of early local church organization? You will read the New Testament through for a word regarding the source of the organization of the early church and you will receive none. That is, you do not have any specific instruction, you do not have a statement in which the author says, “Now historically the organization of the local church came into existence in this way.” Now we gather its organization and the source of it from other factors. Now suddenly in the Book of Acts elders appear on the scene without any announcement. In the epistles we have clear reference to deacons without any announcement of their prototypes or precursors. We discover that in the Jewish synagogue there was an organization that is remarkably similar to the early church organization. They had elders, they had open meetings, they had men who were, although not precisely such, similar to deacons. And the implication that you get as you

read along that the early church while it was not guided by any pattern precisely, if it had any model had its model in the Jewish synagogue with which they were all familiar.

Now you can see evidence for this. For example, when the Apostle Paul came to Antioch in Pasidia and he came in the meeting and as is was the custom in the synagogue meetings, anyone who was a teacher of the word might speak. And when Paul and his friends came in the leader of the synagogue turned to Paul and said, “If you have any word of exhortation for us speak on.” He was a visitor and he was allowed to speak and so he got up in the meeting and spoke and gave us that wonderful sermon at Antioch in Pasidia. If we had one man ministry in the synagogue we’d never have Acts chapter 13 in our Bibles, for which I’m very glad, I must say, that we did not have the other and the apostle spoke out. So it appears, then, that the idea back of the elder was the elder in Judaism and ultimately in the Jewish synagogue.

So that what we probably have, as Professor Hort and others have suggested, in the New Testament is a government that arose out of that pattern. Now it is only a pattern and it was only a guide, and the New Testament veers from it in many particulars but if we were to look for any source of New Testament organization that is where we should go.

Now thirdly and finally, the nature of local church organization. Now remember that the lord is the head of the church. And consequently the head of every local church is the Lord Jesus Christ. The head of Believers Chapel is the Lord Jesus Christ. It s the duty of those who are under him to find his mind on every question. It is the duty of elders when they meet to seek the mind of the Lord. That’s why in our elders meetings, for example, we’ve followed the policy. I don’t suppose any business organization could really follow this policy out but we followed the policy. We don’t act unless we are unanimous in our viewpoints.

The reason is very simple, we believe that God is able to communicate his mind to us and we feel that we should be able to receive it. And if we are at odds over what we

should do we should not do anything until we have unanimity. And so we wait until we either have unanimity or we have a situation in which everybody is willing to follow a certain course of action even though we may have privately some reservations about it.

For we believe that we should have that unanimity. The Lord is the head of the church. And by the way, if we take a step outside of the will of God we also ought to be willing to acknowledge our mistakes. And we have made our mistakes and a few of them we've acknowledged too. We felt in the beginning, by the way that we should be flexible. That is, if we discover something from the teaching of God's word that is different from that which we see now we should be willing to modify, and some things we have modified.

Now the term office is not really found in the New Testament. I knew that you will search and you will find office ten or eleven times in the English. But actually in the Greek text of the New Testament the term office is not found. Startlingly the Greeks had many words for offices and I am not contending that we do not have offices, I just want you to see the force back of this. The Greeks had many words for office but those terms are not applied to the offices of the New Testament. For example, the Greek had a word, several words, but one word in particular which was used for the head of a civil government or the head of various types of activities, that word is never used in the New Testament of an elder, for example. It's not used of a deacon. In fact, you're startled as you read the New Testament to discover that they almost went out of their way to avoid any sense of officialism and any sense of position, per say. And the deacon is called a servant. The elder engages in ministry service. In fact, it's almost as if, though not quite, and I think it's still proper to say offices, it's almost as if these offices are functions more than offices.

But now in the New Testament there are two offices. Well I should say one word first about the congregation. For the congregation or the body, the local body, is the basic organization of the local church. Membership in the local church is accomplished

by one thing, by belief in Jesus Christ. The moment you are born again you are a member of the church of Jesus Christ, and per say, a member of the local church. Although it was the custom in the New Testament for them to be immediately baptized and then brought into the fellowship of the local church. They didn't wait around. They were baptized on the day they were converted. If they were converted out by the wayside and somebody was able to baptize, and anybody could baptize in the local church, they were baptized immediately. There was no waiting period to see if they were genuinely Christians or anything like that, they were baptized immediately, and then they entered the fellowship of the local church. It seems to me that that's the proper pattern to follow. We are converted through the preaching of the word, we are baptized in water, and then we take our place among the people of God, the baptism being the testimony. We'll talk about that later on.

You will notice that in the New Testament there is no such thing as a church role. They were immediately brought into the fellowship of other believers and there was no church role. By the way, that's why we do not have a church membership in Believers Chapel in which we have a role and your name is inscribed upon the role. We do, however, believe in church membership. And if you have believed in Jesus Christ you are a member of the church and ideally a member of us. And so if you've come in fellowship with us you are one of us. And by the way, we feel the right too, if you've come, to counsel you if discipline is needed. Now you may slam your door in our face, and that's fine, well I mean that's not fine really [Laughter], I wouldn't like that, but nevertheless that, of course, is your right before God. But we would feel our right and our privilege as elders to execute discipline. Now it's a serious thing to be in the church of Jesus Christ and so membership then by the new birth, entrance into the local church ordinarily by baptism, no church roles but church membership and the elders should keep a record of who is in the local church.

Now then, the two offices -- and with this I'm going to close because I want to have some questions and we'll continue it next time -- the two offices in the local church are the elders and the deacons. Now you'll notice in 1st Timothy chapter 3, and verse 2, that we read a bishop, then, must be blameless, the husband of one wife. And you might be puzzled as to why the apostle speaks of bishop and yet I say that there are two offices; elders and deacons. Will you turn over to Titus chapter 1?

Paul states in verse 5,

“For this cause left I thee in Crete, that thou shouldest set in order the things that are wanting, and ordain elders in every city, as I had appointed thee: If any be blameless, the husband of one wife, having faithful children not accused of riot or unruly. For a bishop must be blameless.”

Did you see that? Appoint elders. Titus, “For a bishop must be blameless.” In other words, the one office was given the two-fold designation; elder, bishop. Let's turn to Acts chapter 20. Verse 17, Acts chapter 20, “And from Miletus he sent to Ephesus, and called the elders of the church.” Verse 28, he's speaking to them and he says, “Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers.” That's the same Greek word found in Titus and Timothy, bishop.

So he calls the elders of the church and he says, “Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, (bishops).” Elder, bishop are the same. And even Bishop Lightfoot, perhaps the greatest scholar of the Anglican Church of the 19th Century acknowledged that the two offices were the same. Why were they called elders and bishops? Well they were called elders because of the dignity of the office. They were called bishops or overseers because of the duties that they were to carry out. Next time we'll talk about the plurality of them and get on in our studies. But I want to give just a few minutes for questions.

So very quickly if you have some questions up to this point speak up and I'll try to answer them.

[Question from audience]

[Johnson] Okay, that's a good question. As a matter of fact I was going to say something about that too. The reason why we should organize our churches like that now, I might say first of all that type of objection is an attack on all biblical doctrine ultimately. Because, you see, if I were to really answer that question, “That's right,” the next step would be the early church believed in salvation through the blood of Christ. We know now that that's not the type of doctrine that we ought to believe. That's old fashioned and out of date.

The early church believed it but we don't believe it and it's not necessary now. That is the basis of the theological position of 75% of liberal ministers today. The early church believed it but we are more enlightened and therefore we can take up office and position in the same church today, though our doctrinal standard is otherwise, and we can carry on a ministry. So I would say that's detrimental to all biblical doctrine. That excuse could be used for everything ultimately.

But to be more to the point biblically too, now, the problem is a question of method in principle. We believe, I'm speaking for the elders, I think I'm speaking for the elders. I believe, let me put it that way, I believe that we may carry on the work of the Lord in many different methods but we must never, by a method, violate a principle.

Now the principle of the freedom to exercise spiritual gifts, for example, in the meeting of the church is a biblical principle. That is, the Holy Spirit is the real head in the ministry of the word in the meeting of the church, the meeting. Now if we do not have that kind of organization we violate a principle, we quench the Spirit, as Paul said in 1st Thessalonians 5. “Despise not prophesyings. Prove all things; hold fast that which is

good.” In other words, if we meet otherwise and we do not violate a principle, fine. But if we meet otherwise and violate a principle then we have met contrary to Scripture and that’s why it’s necessary.

Now not everything in the New Testament is to be carried out. I do not go up, for example, to Bob here and, “Greet him with an holy kiss,” Sunday morning. I don’t violate any principle by shaking hands with him instead of greeting him with a holy kiss, there is no biblical principle in Bob in that. A Frenchman might carry that out literally. But to have one man, for example, who is over a congregation to carry on all the ministry and only that ministry -- we’ll talk about this in great detail later on -- but that violates a principle of the freedom of the Holy Spirit to use everybody who has a spiritual gift to minister to the whole body, not just in a Sunday school class, but the whole body of the Christians. Does that answer your question?

In other words, methods may vary but methods must never vary to the place where they violate a principle. And if they do then of course we have to back off. I believe myself that there are many ways in which we could do things in Believers Chapel other than the way we’re doing them now. But there are certain principles we can never violate.

Times up, let’s close with a word... Yes ma’am.

[Question from the audience]

[Johnson] Believers Chapel.

[Comment from the same audience member]

[Johnson] Well the reason we are is because we don't really think of ourselves as Believers Church. We don't think of ourselves as any name. Believers Chapel is a name of the building in which we meet, so to speak.

In other words, when you look at Believers Chapel ultimately on Church OA it will be a chapel. It will be a place where the church meets. We don't believe that we should give ourselves any name other than just the church of Jesus Christ, a group of believers. In other words, there is no name.

[Comment from the same audience member]

[Johnson] It's the place where a church meets, right, Believers Chapel. It will be a chapel, a place where people meet. By the way, in the early days of colonial America they understood this. Because, you remember, they called their churches what? Remember? Meeting houses, remember? They didn't call them church. Meeting house, that was the meeting house, that's what we want to call it. It was the place where the church met.

Now as long as we're in a building like this and we call ourselves Believers Chapel I agree with you, that's a misnomer [Laughter].

[Comment from the same audience member]

[Johnson] We don't know of any other group believes specifically the way we do. We are absolutely independent from any other group.

[Comment from the same audience member]

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[Johnson] We differ. We differ from them on some important particulars. Though we, of course, like them in the Lord.

[Comment from the same audience member]

[Johnson] Of course we regard all Christians highly in the Lord but we differ with them on some important particulars. Let's have a word of prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we thank Thee for the privilege of meeting together and we pray that as we discuss the things that concern the local church we be guided by the Holy Spirit into the truth. And help us Lord to think clearly. And above all may we find the mind of the Spirit, each one of us and help us to study the Scriptures and may...

**[RECORDING ENDS ABRUPTLY]**