

Why You Still Need the Church Today

Various Passages

Pastor Jeremy Cagle, July 25, 2021

I'll turn with you to the book of First Corinthians. That's what we're going to be looking at this morning. We're going to be opening the Word of God to the book of First Corinthians. And while we're doing that, let me just say that we are getting ready to start a new series here at Grace in a couple of weeks. We're going to do one on the book of Ecclesiastes. I haven't told you this before. But we're doing that because I think Chilliwack is in a very Ecclesiastes kind of place right now. It's in a time where people really need to hear the message of that book. And the message is that money can't buy you happiness. It was written by a man who had all the money in the world, he had all the cars and boats and houses that he could buy, and he was miserable. It's a book that a guy wrote at the end of his life when he was about as unhappy as he could be. And the whole point of the book is that all these tangible things can't give you peace. So we're going to talk about that in a few weeks. We'll look at that together. But before we do, we're spending some time on the church. And I've told you why in recent sermons, so I won't go into that now. But if you look in First Corinthians 12, I just want to read that to you before we get started. In First Corinthians 12, verse four, if you'd read that with me, Paul writes, and he says,

Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are varieties of ministries, and the same Lord. There are varieties of effects, but the same God who works all things in all persons. But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. For to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, and to another the word of knowledge according to the same Spirit; to another faith by the same Spirit, and to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, and to another the effecting of miracles, and to another prophecy, and to another the distinguishing of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, and to another the interpretation of tongues. But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually just as He wills.

For even as the body is one and yet has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.

We'll end the reading there. As you read that, you can tell it's quite a passage, isn't it? It's pretty full of good truth, but just to explain it some, if you've read this book before, you'll know that the book of Corinthians is considered to be the messiest book in the Bible, because the church at Corinth was a mess. It was an absolute spiritual disaster. Of all the books that you read about, all the churches you read about, this one is at the bottom of the barrel. And just to show you why, if you look back in chapter one, some of the issues that this church was facing, it says they were fighting over leadership. In chapter one, verse 11 of First Corinthians, it says,

For I have been informed concerning you, my brethren, by Chloe's people, that there are quarrels among you. Now I mean this, that each one of you is saying, "I am of Paul," and "I of Apollos," and "I of Cephas," and "I of Christ."

In other words, they were fighting over which preacher they liked the most. They were fighting over which personality they wanted to follow. One group said, I like Paul, and other one said, I like Apollos. I know you guys

have never seen anything like that before in the modern church, right? That's how the fighting started. That's where it began. Paul said this was so dumb. He says in verse 13,

Has Christ been divided?

What in the world are you doing, he says. We're on the same side. Then in chapter five, if you turn over a little bit, it says they were fighting over a man who committed adultery. Because chapter five verse one says this, it says,

It is actually reported that there is immorality among you, and immorality of such a kind as does not exist even among the Gentiles, that someone has his father's wife.

In other words, that guy was sleeping with his father's spouse. He was involved in her, and Paul says, you approved of it. Verse one says the Gentiles don't approve of it, but you do. You think it's wonderful because it makes you so open minded. Just to catch you up to speed to chapter 12, chapter six says they were fighting over lawsuits in the church. They were actually taking people to court. Chapter seven says they're fighting over marriage and what marriage is supposed to look like. Chapter eight, they're doing it over Christian freedom. In 11, the Lord's Supper, and in chapter 12, they're fighting over the gifts. Apparently, some are using their spiritual gifts to say, I'm better than you. I have this gift, you don't, therefore I'm the greater Christian. And so Paul says, in order to deal with this, in verse 13, he says,

For by one Spirit, we were all baptized into one body.

In other words, you serve the same God. Stop fighting. You serve the same spirit. But all this is to say, the church in Corinth was a mess. It was an absolute disaster. There wasn't a single issue in the Christian life they weren't fighting over. There wasn't a single doctrine or theology or topic they weren't butting heads with. And that's a great reminder of where the modern church is at today, isn't it? It's a great reminder of what we're doing. We are the church in Corinth right now. Amen? Can you think of one issue in the Christian life that the church today is not fighting over? Can you think of one? I can't? And we fight over the color of gravel, don't we?

Let me take Christian leaders, for example. I don't want to ask you this. But how many of you know someone who quotes a Christian leader more than they quote the Bible? How many of you know someone who quotes John MacArthur more than they quote the apostle John? Now we love John MacArthur. I love John MacArthur. But people do that, don't they? And then they quote R. C. Sproul. And what do they do? They fight with them. They go to war. They say I like this one. No, I like that one. He has more books. No, he has. They're thicker. Or take adultery, for instance. I mean, how many of you know someone who claims to be a Christian, and yet they're committing adultery? You don't even want to raise your hand. It's embarrassing. But it happens all over the place. Take lawsuits. There's a there's a famous church in Virginia right now that's involved in a lawsuit, because they're not following their bylaws. That's what it's about. They went to the secular authorities and said, I want to sue these people, because they're not doing what I signed up for.

But the point is that we fight over all of it. So that if Paul was going to write a letter to us today, he would write the same thing. He would change the name of Corinth to Chilliwack and send it out. We had a saying growing up that nobody fights like Baptists, because you can put them in a room and it won't be long before they tear each other's eyes out. You can say the same thing about any denomination in the world right now. Some of you have

told me that you come from backgrounds where it's been just fight after fight for you. It's been just problem after problem. To the point that you've seen denominations spring up in your lifetime. You can point to certain denominations and say, I was 12 years old when that started because of a fight. Others have told me you've had to leave your previous church over this because the fighting was so bad that it hindered your walk with God. You could not honor the Lord and attend church there anymore. Which is so sad because it's so common.

You know, I grew up in Tennessee and the Bible Belt in the US a long way from here, 2000 miles away. And we had 10,000 people in my hometown and 40 churches, and they all fought. Chilliwack has 100,000 people in 60 churches, we had 40 of them. Church Street ran down the center of town and you had the Presbyterian Church, Baptist Church, Methodist Church. Around the corner, you had the Catholic Church, Pentecostal church, which was very loud on Sundays, you could hear them from down the road. And by the time I graduated college, I'd seen seven of my friends fired for serving in those places. And one went to a church that split three times afterwards, once over music, once over an affair that someone had, and then once over money.

And it raises a question when you read what's going on in the church in Corinth and think about these things, it raises the question, if the church is this bad, is it still worth it today? If it's this mean and nasty towards people, if it's this ugly and violent, should we still keep it around? Or should we try something else? You've got to be asking that today. At least a lot of people are asking that question nowadays. In light of recent events, you see them staying home and watching sermons online and calling that a church. I mean, even after the restrictions are lifted, people are still doing that. Or you see other people getting together on a Sunday. They have a service, but they're just winging it. There's no structure. They don't practice the ordinances. They don't take the Lord's Supper and baptism. They don't do church discipline. They have no elders and deacons. And yet they call that a church. It's just a bunch of people gathered around a guitar and a Bible. And it makes you wonder, is that what God wants us to do? We'll be talking about that this morning.

I think you could call this this phenomenon, the church of the scattered sheep, or the Church of the missing ones. I talk to so many pastors today that are just spending all their time trying to find their sheep. And more and more people seem to be doing that right now. I remember talking to a family member years ago, and all this fighting had an effect on them, and she said she didn't want to go to church anymore because people were mean there. So I said, Well aren't people are mean everywhere? I mean, are you gonna stop going to the gym? She said, Yeah, but they're supposed to be Christians there. I didn't know what to say. She had a point. But I've had some time to think about her response. And what I want to do this morning is tell you what I would have said to her if I had a second chance, because I want to give you some reasons why the church is still needed today.

So if you're taking notes this morning, and you want to write these down, in First Corinthians 12 and in some other passages, I just wanted you to see several reasons why you still need the church. And we're going to do this because when I was in seminary, I remember John MacArthur telling us that when he started ministry, he was shocked at the issues he had to deal with. Like the Lordship salvation controversy, or the LGBTQ stuff, he never saw that coming. And I say the same thing about my ministry. I never thought I'd have to tell people why they have to go to church. Because when I read the Bible, it's pretty self-explanatory. There's a church on every page of the New Testament. And the apostles' job was clear. They moved to a town; they started a church. Then they went to another town; they started another one. They didn't start a business. They didn't start a parachurch ministry. They started the church. And Jesus, before that, died for the church. He gave his life for it. He didn't do that for the internet. He didn't do it for social media. Same way with the great heroes of the faith. If you look at

men like Augustine, and Martin Luther, and Jonathan Edwards, and Charles Spurgeon, they all served one thing. Because there's no plan B in the Bible. There's no other way to reach the world. The church is it. So let's talk about why that is this morning, with four reasons why the church is necessary.

The first one is because you're a member of the church, whether you realize it or not. The first reason why the church is still necessary today is because if you're a Christian, you're a member of the church, whether you realize it or not. Which means that when you're saved, this is what God did: he baptized you into the body of Christ. And if you look in chapter 12, again, and look in verse 12, which we just read, I want to want you to see this here. He says,

For even as the body is one and yet has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.

And as Paul is dealing with these issues in the church in Corinth, he's just knocking them down one after another. It's like bowling pins, you know. Or whack a mole. You can't ever get to enough of them. Every time he addresses one issue, there's another one that raises its ugly head in the book. But as he does that, he comes to this passage to the issue of gifts. And he says in verse four, if you look up here, he says,

Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit.

In other words, you Corinthians all have different gifts. They come in different shapes and sizes, just like our congregation. And we come to church on a Sunday, you guys all have different gifts, you don't look the same. But he says, Don't forget where they came from. They came from the same spirit. So you need to stop fighting over them. And he says in verse 11, further down, he says,

But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually just as He wills.

In other words, the gifts are distributed by God. He divides them up, so you shouldn't use him to say I'm better than you. And then to drive that point home, he says in verse 13,

For by one spirit, we were all baptized into one body.

Just to explain what he's telling you here, to be baptized means to be immersed in something or dunked into it, like you would dunk an object in water, to the point that it consumes you. You can't be dunked halfway. You're either dunked or you're not. It's the same way with being saved. It's an all-consuming thing. And as it happens, Paul says, The Spirit places you into one body, which is why you shouldn't be fighting all the time, because it's like you're fighting your own flesh here.

Now, obviously, when he says one body, he was not referring to one physical body because there's not one church we all belong to. The church is too big for that. Instead, this is what you would call the universal church. This is the church that meets everywhere. When you're saved, you're baptized into that. And we have local churches. There's a local church that meets in Chilliwack. There's ones that meet in Abbotsford, you see ones in Langley, Vancouver, other parts of the lower mainland. But verse 13 is talking about the universal church. This is the

church that meets in all places at once. Because Paul says, when you became a Christian, you were placed into that. You may not have been aware of it, but it happened. It's also been called the mystical church or the spiritual church because it's a church of the Spirit. It's something you can't see with the naked eye. When you go to Walmart, you can't look around and tell who the Christians are, can you? It'd be a lot nicer. You'd go to that cashier register, right? But you can't, it's unseen. But all the ones who were saved are all part of the same universal church. This is the body that he's creating all throughout the world. This is the one he's been forming all throughout human history. And the way Paul says this is interesting, because he says,

For by one spirit, we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free.

And the words "Jews or Greeks" is a reference to the biggest barrier anyone knew of in the first century. Because the first century Jews hated the Greeks. They thought they were dirty. They were unclean, immoral people. And the Gentiles or Greeks felt the same way about the Jews. They thought they were arrogant, had their nose up in the sky kind of thing. There's the same dynamic going on with slaves and freemen, they didn't like each other. And what Paul says here is when you become a Christian, all of that gets washed away. All of that changes now, not on the outside, but on the inside. Doesn't change you physically, but it changes your heart, because a Jew is still a Jew and a Gentile, still a Gentile, but not in the eyes of heaven. Race doesn't mean anything to God. Money doesn't mean anything to him. He doesn't care about white or black, rich or poor.

It's the same way in this church, which means that when you come to church, here's the application here, when you come to church, you don't step down off your social ladder; you throw it away. You step off of it. It doesn't matter in this room. It means that when you come into this tent, you don't look down at the people as if they're beneath you. It's the opposite. You look at them as if you're beneath them. You're the lowest sinner in the room.

But all this is to say that if you're in Christ, you're part of this now. This is who you are. We could also say if you don't know what this is like, you've never even been saved. This is what salvation is. It levels the playing field. You might be rich or poor out there, but it doesn't matter in here. Now, several years ago, I was at a Thanksgiving event when two of my relatives were arguing. I know you guys have never had relatives argue at a holiday event, ever, over religious things. But they were arguing about whether you had to go to church or not. And one of them was a Lutheran pastor who served in the military. And he said, Can you be a soldier and not fight in the army? He said, can you be a warrior and not pick up a gun? In the same way you can't be a Christian and not go to church, it doesn't work that way. Because you belong to this now. God has made you part of something bigger than you. And you need to remember that.

In fact, this is one of the reasons why I love our church so much, because you guys come from everywhere. I counted it up the other day, and we have people from 11 different countries and four different continents in our church. And you don't have anything else in common but this. You don't dress alike. You don't talk alike. You don't act alike. It's kind of tough sometimes being a pastor of this thing. But you are alike because of Christ. Amen? That's what draws you together. And that's the beauty of this. That's why it's supernatural. The world can't create this. This is not something that lost people can do. They try. They try to pass laws and do it. They try to get the psychologists involved and tell you how to get along. It doesn't work by the way. This can only be done in Christ. It's why the devil is so interested in splitting a church.

It brings us to another point to consider this morning, another reason why the church is necessary. The first one is because you're part of the church, whether you realize it or not. The second one is this. You're not supposed to go through the Christian life alone. A second reason why the church is so necessary today is because you're not supposed to go through the Christian life alone, which means you're not intended to do it yourself. You need to be with others. And the church is here to remind you of that. Every week, you need to come in here and remember, I can't do this by myself. I used to think America was a land of independence. I think Canada deserves that title. People love their independence here. They go off in the woods and there's not anybody within 100 miles. But you can't stay that way and be a Christian. You've got to be with others.

And if you want to keep your finger in the book of First Corinthians, we'll turn back there in a moment, but look at Galatians chapter six with me. Like I said earlier, we're going to flip through a couple passages this morning. I just want you to get to the full council of God on this. But if you would turn two books to the right to Galatians chapter six. This book has affectionately been called Paul's fighting epistle. Because as I told you before, this was a common problem in the New Testament. Everybody was fighting all the time. And this is another church that did that. And if you look in chapter six, this is very interesting in light of the book, because here's how we starts ending it. He says,

Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted. Bear one another's burdens, and thereby fulfill the law of Christ.

That's quite a thing to say in this letter, because if you've read Galatians, you'll know it's a contentious book. The whole thing is full of harsh language. For example, if you look back in chapter three, he calls them fools in that chapter. He says in chapter three, verse one, he says,

You foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was portrayed as crucified.

I don't have to tell you that that's not a very polite thing to say to someone in a letter. I don't know if you've ever sent an email like that before. Then he says it again in verse three. He says,

Are you so foolish, having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?

So he calls him fools twice there, which is the tone of this whole thing, but to balance it out at the end, he says,

Brethren [in chapter six], if anyone is caught in a trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one.

The word restore here is an interesting word, because it's a Greek word *katartizō*, which means to heal something or put it back together again. It was the same word that was often used in the Bible for mending a net that was broken by the wind. It comes apart, and Paul says, Now you need to put it back together. And the idea here is that the church at Galatia has become broken over this issue. They're fighting, torn up, over the law. Some, they're saying, you know, we need to keep the law in order to be saved. We have to do it in order to be a Christian. As Paul says, this should be your response to each other: you need to restore one another. And he says, bear one another's burdens. That means help someone carry them. Help them pick up the load when it gets heavy. Because

that's what the church does. Church doesn't argue and fight and debate all the time, we don't yell and fuss and squabble with each other, we help each other out too. Even in a letter like this, even in a place like Galatians, Paul reminds them that you need to support each other. You can't make it on your own. It's been said the church is not a shooting gallery for sinners, it's a hospital for them. We're not supposed to line everybody up and just knock them down. It's not here to tear people down. It's here to build people up.

But the point is, it can't do that for you if you don't come to it. The church can't help you this way, if you're not a part of it. You know, according to the latest statistics I could find, about half of all Canadians still claim to be Christians today, which kind of blew my mind. But about 55% make a profession. But a huge portion of them never go to church. They're only here for holidays and weekends. Which means the church doesn't do them any good whatsoever. Because it has no part in their lives. I've done funerals for people that I don't know anything about. The reason is because they have no pastor in their life. They have no connection to the church. And I sit there in front of the casket, and I think, I can't help you now. There's not a thing I can do for you. I can help your family, but not you. You're gone. It's too late now.

Some of you know this, I used to write for a website called Just the Simple Truth, which got emails occasionally. Didn't get a lot, but we got a few, and one of them I received really highlights this because here's what it said. It said, "At last! I could not believe my eyes when I clicked on the website. All I've ever wanted was just a simple truth. The churches in my area do not offer the basic tenets of the faith or good theology. No one wants to dig into scripture and make us think like the great theologians. So because of pop Christianity and liberal theology, I haven't been to church in years. I've continued reading the Bible, praying, and I often write about my faith. Thank you again for your ministry." Did you catch what she said there? She said, Because the churches in my area don't teach truth, I haven't been in years. I do it alone. I read the Bible. I pray. I like good theology, but I do it all by myself. You would call this the maverick Christian or the solo Christian or the numero uno Christian. The attitude is that I can handle it all by myself. It's me against the world. And the reality is, you can't. It doesn't work. It didn't work for the monks in the desert. It won't work for you. You fight alone, you die alone in the Christian life. Because there's times you're going to want to sin, and you need someone to help you with that. There's times when it's late at night or, or early in the morning, and you're going to stumble and fall into a trap like the Galatians did. And you'll need someone to pull you out of it. And if there's nobody in your life, you're going to fall and die.

This is something that some of the medical people have picked up on recently, but with all the isolation that's been going on with the Coronavirus, they've seen an increase in anxiety among people, because they're lonely. They're all alone. And so when trouble comes, they have nobody to help them and they're scared to death about it. God says it shouldn't be that way for you. We shouldn't live like that. We need to be with the church.

And that brings us to another point to consider in this discussion. Another reason why the church is necessary. And that is because Jesus came to save a multitude and not just you. Another reason why the church is necessary, and this is probably the hardest hitting one that we'll look at this morning, is because Jesus came to save a multitude and not just you. Which means you're not the only one that he died for. He died for more than that. And if you would turn back to First Corinthians chapter 10 with me. And as you're turning there, I might say something offensive here. But I want you to know, I don't mean it to be, I just want it to be biblical. But some of you have heard it said that if you were the only person in the world, Jesus would have died for you. Anybody ever heard that before? Does that sound familiar? If you were the only one who ever lived in the planet, he would have come down and been crucified just for you. I want to tell you that that's wrong. It's not found in the Bible.

Because you are special. That's true, you're made in the image of God, you're made a little lower than the angels. But the idea that Jesus came to save you alone is wrong. It's just not found in the Bible. In fact, if you read through the Bible, you can see the vast majority of the time when it speaks to salvation, it uses plural language. And what I mean is that Jesus came to die for the world, not just one person, but the whole thing, all those who would believe. And he also died for the sheep plural, not just one sheep, but many sheep, the entire flock. He died for his bride that, according to Revelation 19, is a vast multitude. It's so big that when it sings, it shakes the very ground. He died for a kingdom with many subjects. He died for a family with many members. He died for a vine with many branches. He died for a building with many stones. He died for a lamp with many lampstands. But he didn't just die for you. There was a greater thing going on in the mind of God. It was far deeper than that. And if you look in First Corinthians 10, verse 11, this is a verse that just highlights this. And Paul writes, and he says,

Now these things happened to them as an example [they happened to Israel as an example], and they were written for our instruction, upon whom the ends of the ages have come. Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed that he does not fall. No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also.

You may not see the connection here with what I just said, so let me explain it to you. But as Paul is helping the Corinthians with their problems here, he gives them a reminder from Israel's history to say that the Jews had their problems too. You're not the only ones. They had issues as well. And God was faithful to them, so he'll be faithful to you. Don't be anxious, don't be afraid. He says no temptation has overtaken you, but such as is common to man, which means that there's nothing you're facing that someone hasn't faced before. Nothing new under the sun. In fact, this is why there's so much space in the Old Testament given to Israel to show you that men like Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, people like Moses and David and Solomon, they had their struggles too. They had their failures as well. And just as God was faithful to them, he'll be faithful to you.

And the way this applies to us today is that you need to stop thinking about yourself so much because there's more people involved in the plan of God. You've got to stop being so selfish. There are other people on the planet that he's saving. There's other people that he's working with. You saw it in Israel, you see in the church today, and you need to think about them too. In fact, if you're having a bad day, I have a simple solution to that. Are you ready? Do you want some pastoral counseling? Just talk to the person sitting next to you, and you'll feel better. Because they had it worse than you this week. I promise you. It happens all the time, right? You come in a church, you think woe is me, life is so bad. You talk to the person sitting next to you. You say, Oh man, I love my family. My family so much better than theirs. Right? Spend a day with them at the hospital. Spend some time with them down at the morgue, or the funeral home. It'll put a stop to your pity party. I guarantee it right quick. In fact, throughout the years, I've had people come into my office and say, nobody knows what I'm going through. Nobody knows it's this bad. And when I hear that, I have to take them to this passage and say, Are you telling me that in the entire history of the world, no one has ever struggled with sin as bad as you? Of course not, right? Are you telling me that from Adam and Eve and from the creation until today, 1000s of years of history, and no one has ever battled with alcohol this bad? No one has ever had this terrible of a marriage? He makes us think that way, the devil does that; he isolates us. He separates us from others, and he twists our mind. And Paul says, you can't let him do that today. You can't become that selfish.

I don't know if you guys have ever seen those videos of lions hunting elephants in Africa. But the way it always works is to kill an elephant—they're too big for the lion to get on his own in a herd. So they get him away from the herd. They paw at his back, scratch his legs, just get them to wander off. And when they wander off all alone, they kill him. Friends, Christians are the same way. You die. Just like an elephant, you need to stay with the herd.

It brings us to one more point in all of this. And we'll tie it off with this one. Let me just summarize the other ones here. The first one is, the church is necessary because you are a member of the church whether you realize it or not. It's also necessary because you're not supposed to go through the Christian life alone. It is so sad that the Christian landscape today is just littered with Christians who have gone off on their own and died. They believe the craziest things because there's no one to hold them accountable. Church is necessary to prevent that. It's also necessary because Jesus came to save a multitude, not just you. And it brings us to one more reason we want to talk about today. And that is that it's necessary because you can't obey the Bible without it.

The church is necessary in all of this because you can't obey the Bible without it. Which means that there are commands in the Bible that can only be kept here and nowhere else. There are instructions that are given to us that can only be followed in the church. So that if you take the church out, you actually live in sin because you can't obey them. It's that serious. And I'm not gonna ask you to turn to one passage here for the sake of time, because this is something that's found all throughout the Bible. But if you do want to turn to just a single one, if you want to look over to First Timothy chapter four with me, I just want you to see this one. There's other ones that we're going to talk about as well. If you want to look in First Timothy, chapter four, this is an important one because Paul is talking to a pastor here. He's talking to a leader of a church. And so you can tell what's on his mind for the church as you read First Timothy, and in chapter four, verse 13. Paul says these words, he says,

Until I come, give attention to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation and teaching.

As you look at that, you can see the word “public” in there. In other words, Timothy, you should do these things publicly when other people are around. You should read the scriptures like we do on Sunday mornings. You guys see us do that every week. You should give exhortation, which means a challenge and teaching, preaching. You can do it and record it, that's fine. You can do it and put it all over the internet the way a lot of churches do today. We do that here. No problem. But it needs to be public as well. I know that's a controversial thing to say nowadays, because some people think you don't have to go to church to listen to a sermon. And in a sense, that's true. You can listen to a sermon on a podcast. You can listen to it on your iPhone, that's fine. But in another sense, there needs to be a public audience. Because we've all heard sermons that we don't like very much, right? Online? And we just say, Click, and turn it off. And we've all heard them on the radio, and we change the channel. Paul says Timothy, people need to be in a place where they can't change the channel. They need to be somewhere where they're forced to listen to it, whether they like it or not.

So that's one command that's found in Scripture, you give attention to the public reading and teaching of Scripture. Another one is this, you need to practice church discipline as well. That's another thing the Bible tells us to do in the church. We need to hold people accountable for their sins. This is something you see in Matthew, chapter 18. I'm just going to read this to you, you can turn there if you like. But we see this in Matthew, chapter 18, verses 15 to 17, when it says this. By the way, I mentioned last week one of the first times the word “church” is mentioned in the New Testament. This is the second time it's ever mentioned. So that's the setting here. It says,

If your brother sins, go and show him his fault in private; if he listens to you, you've won your brother. But if he does not listen to you, take one or two more with you, so that by the mouth of two or three witnesses every fact may be confirmed. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. [So that's the second time the word is seen.] And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile or a tax collector.

This is one of the more sober passages in the Bible. But as you read it, you can tell there's several steps to follow here. And they all end up with the church getting involved. It's not really necessarily involved in the beginning, but it is toward the end. And it says if someone sins, you need to go to them personally. You address it in private. Don't make a big show of it. Maybe you can just deal with it in a closed manner. And if it continues, you take more people along, two or three is what it says. And then if they don't repent—and the idea of this process is you give space in between each step in order to see if repentance has occurred. This is not a quick process. There are quick processes for church discipline in the Bible; this is just not one of them. You give time to see if repentance has occurred. And if they don't repent, he says here, you tell it to the church. But the whole understanding in this passage is you can't do that if you're not part of the church. You can only do this if it's a regular part of your life. This is not something for strangers to do. We've had a few instances in our church where that's kind of been brought to us. Church discipline is not something for an outsider to show up on a Sunday and say, Hey, guys, I want you to discipline someone for me. That's not the point here. Wouldn't it be a disaster if you did that? This is only done if you're consistent member of it. It's something that's to be done as a command in Scripture.

We can mention other commands as well, like singing. Ephesians five, verse 18 tells us this when it comes to singing. We sing every Sunday for a reason here. But in Ephesians five, verse 18, it says,

Do not get drunk with wine, but be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in songs and hymns and spiritual songs.

And where it says speaking to one another, it means you can sing in private, that's fine. Some of you probably do that at home. But you're also to sing to one another. There's to be a public witness to the music to encourage you. Colossians three, verse 16, says the same thing. Another command is prayer. We are to pray corporately as well. It's a congregational thing. We have to keep the ordinances, baptism and the Lord's Supper. We're going to do that here in just a moment. We're going to practice one another's, have fellowship. But the point is all of this is supposed to be done within the context of a local church. All those commands can only be kept here. You can put some of it off for a season, and that's fine. You may have set it aside for a few months to deal with a pandemic like we've done. But it can't happen forever.

The church has a public testimony to the world. It has a corporate testimony. We have individual testimonies, you guys go to your workplaces, you go to your jobs, you have your families, and you share the light of Christ there. But the church also does it as a body. It's something that's commanded to us in the Word of God. Next week, we're going to talk about another aspect of the church, and that'll be its mission. We're going to talk about what God has called the church to do in the world. But for this week, to summarize all of this, a church is necessary because at the end of the day, you can't obey the Bible without it. You can't do what it says because it was written in such a way that if you take the church out, the whole thing collapses. The book doesn't make any sense. The letter of Romans was written to a church. It wasn't written to a group of Christians just hanging out in someone's living room. And the letter to the Corinthians was written to a church, and the Galatians, as well. You see it in the

letter to the Ephesians, and the Philippians and Colossians. You see it in the books of Timothy and Titus and Thessalonians. All that was written to the church.

Even with all its faults and blemishes, the church is still near and dear to the heart of God. And I wish I had time to give you some more reasons why it's necessary. There's so much more to say about this subject, but every major movement of God started with the church. We often forget our history. But if you look down in the annals of church history, you'll see that whether you come from a Baptist background or a Methodist background, whether you're Mennonite or Reformed, or Plymouth Brethren, it all happened in a church somewhere. You could add to this that the doctrines we receive, we've been given from the church. The way it works is the Bible taught the doctrine, and the church defended it throughout history. The Bible gives us the truths that we profess, and the church kept it safe throughout the ages. The church has also spread the gospel more than anything else in creation, it has baptized more, shepherded more, disciplined more. It's helped more and encouraged more. The church is everything to us as Christians. It's what we have. It's my prayer that our time together this morning would have helped you to see that.

You know, the story is told of a man who stopped attending church, because he didn't think it was necessary anymore. So the pastor came by one evening, and as they sat there by the fire, they watched as the logs died out until the minister picked up a tong and started poking the logs to bring it back to life. And he said, Fran, you're just like this fire that's dying, you need to come back to church for some poking. The man said, I know preacher, I got the message as soon as you picked up the stick. But friends, that's something we all need to hear today. You need to come to church for some poking. You've got to be prodded along in the things of God. And so, will you make it a priority to do that? Will you be faithful to the church? Let me close us in a word of prayer and ask for God's grace in this.

Heavenly Father, Lord, we thank you for what we've talked about this morning with the body of Christ. It is a privilege to be here. Sometimes we can be discouraged that maybe our church isn't this way or our church isn't that way. We can be frustrated because we fight sometimes and have these struggles. But this all exists because your Son died for it. And we don't ever want to take that for granted. Lord, thank you for Grace Fellowship Church, and for the people that you brought into it. Thank you that you've saved their souls. They've been baptized, you died for them. All these things we talked about this morning happened in their lives, and they just come here to reflect that. You're kind and gracious, God, to give us a family like you have. Thank you, Father, also, for the other churches around us that are preaching the truth and the lives that they're reaching for Christ. May we never be weary in these things, Lord. May we always stand firm. Thank you, Father, for this time, and as we approach the Lord's table, would you help us to do it in a worthy manner. We pray this in Christ's name and for His glory. Amen.