



## 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 II”

TRANSCRIPT

[AUDIO BEGINS] morning we are turning again to the local church in the New Testament. And remember last Sunday morning, unfortunately, I told you that we would try to cover this subject in six times taking up these topics: the local church, its organization; the local church, its spiritual gifts; the local church, its priesthood; the local church, its ordinances; the local church, its meetings and ministry; and then the local church, and its discipline. But unfortunately last week, as so often happens when I am teaching, I discovered that I have more material to give than I could possibly give in the time that was generously allotted to me. So this morning I want to finish what I started last time as well as review for just a few moments for those of you who were unable to be here.

Now remember that last time as we began I spoke about the fact that the term church as used in several senses. In the New Testament it's used in the sense of the universal body of believers, whether on earth or in heaven. And then I pointed out that the word is used to denote a group of local churches with no denominational concept, but nevertheless a group of local churches and occasionally you find the word, “The church,” in that sense.

And finally, that you find the word at least often and perhaps oftenest in the sense of one single local church in some geographical locality. I also pointed out that the sense in which we use the word today is in many cases not found in the New Testament. For example, we use the church of a building. That is not found in the New Testament. We use the term church of a denomination. That is not found in the New Testament. We also use the term church of a state church, such as the Anglican Church or the Church of Scotland. Now that sense is not found in the New Testament. Occasionally we use the term church, some of us, not I but some, in the sense of the Kingdom of God. Now that sense, too, is not found in the New Testament.

I pointed out that we're going to be concerned with the local church. That is, what does the New Testament have to say about the local group of believers who meet in a particular geographical locality and attempt to carry on the ministry of the Lord? I also tried to point out to you that the New Testament is very definite in its teaching concerning ecclesiology, which is the doctrine of the church. Contrary to the viewpoints of some expressed in words like this the Bible is not clear on ecclesiology or the Bible teaches different ecclesiologies. The Bible has no set ecclesiology. The New Testament has a very definite ecclesiology. In fact, and I made the statement and I will continue to make it, that the Bible is just as clear in its teaching concerning the local church as it is in its doctrine of salvation.

Now that may startle you but I think it can be definitely substantiated. And if you only for one moment think about the place of baptism in the plan of salvation I think you will agree that the statement that I just made is not so radical as it might seem at first. The New Testament is very clear in its ecclesiology.

I also went on to point out by way of introduction that this subject is an extremely important subject because God is concerned primarily today with the local church. Now I did not attack any ministries which are not in the local church, not related to the local church, although I did make reference to ministry such as Campus Crusade, Intervarsity

Christian Fellowship, Dallas Theological Seminary, Young Life, foreign mission societies, and many other types of Christian work which have been blessed of God. However I do want to say this, and I think the New Testament supports it, but so far as the New Testament is concerned God is most interested in the local church. We exist in order to carry on in our own particular place the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ through the local church.

Consequently if our interest is primarily in activities outside of the local church is very doubtful in my mind that we can be said to be in thorough harmony with the will of God. Now I say this without trying in any way to attack things that are outside the local church. It is quite obvious that God has blessed many organizations that are not directly tied into a local church. My own opinion is they might be blessed even more if they were tied into a local church. But we cannot take the position of criticizing everything that is not thoroughly in harmony with what we see in the New Testament, for after all there are probably some things in what we see that are not too clear. However, occasionally you will have individuals say, “I am interested in Christianity, not churchianity.” I have frequently heard people make a statement like that.

That disjunction is not made in the Bible. It is impossible to be interested in Christianity and not in churchianity in the New Testament sense. Now, of course, I know why someone would make a statement like that, it’s because so often the local church is not in harmony with the Scriptures. But the answer is not to attack the local church or to discount it, cast dispersion upon it. The answer is to get into that local church and attempt, with the help of the Holy Spirit, to improve the situation.

Now what I want to point out too that Christ’s work is directly related to the church. As a matter of fact, Paul says he gave himself for the church. Paul suffered many things for the local church, he said, and considered his greatest sin, the persecution of that local church.

Then I went on as we began to talk about organization to talk about the fact of local church organization and I gave you some reasons why the Bible, I think, definitely states that there is such a thing as local church organization. The churches had offices who cared for the ministry and work of the church. The churches met at appointed times. The churches exercised discipline. The churches regulated their meetings. The churches collected and dispensed money. These functions, I think, make it evident that they had a local church organization. The source of this local church organization I traced probably to the synagogue. Now probably because we cannot be absolutely certain of this but the evidence seems to point that way and most students of the church agree.

Then finally in the last part of the last hour we went on to talk a little bit about the organization that exists in the local church, the nature of it. I said a few words about the congregation or the body of believers. This body of believers is entered by the new birth, usually also by the baptism. In other words, the order being the New Testament times was, first of all, conversion by belief in Jesus Christ, then water baptism, and then the believers began to meet with other believers in the local church. That is the ordinary order.

So far as we can tell there are no church roles of the churches in the early church, but nevertheless they did know who was a member and who was not. And I think it is important that we too know who is a member and who is not.

Then secondly, we went on to talk about elders and under shepherds. Now today I'm going to do something that I wanted to do for a long time because Bill McRae is getting ready to leave us, by the way, for the summer. We're looking forward to him coming back. And I did not want Bill to think that he was the only one who could draw on a blackboard [laughter]. And so today I am going to give you a little evidence of my artwork. And I want to say that Mary did not do this [laughter] contrary to what you think.

And furthermore, I want to say that I did this this morning in my pajamas [laughter] which gives this work a great deal of dedication I think. Now what I want to say about this diagram first is this, it's not inspired [Laughter]. I'm not completely happy with it but it expresses at least some of the things that I want to speak to you about for the remainder of the hour.

Now you will notice that I have put here that Christ is the head of the church as we mentioned last time. Then that there exist such individuals as under shepherds who are elders, servants or deacons, that ministry comes from gifted men. Men who have spiritual gift, and the body of the church is composed of the believers.

Now the reason that I have put a dotted line here is because actually the shepherds, the deacons, the gifted men belong to the church also. In other words, the church is just not the body so that in a sense they all belong. As a matter of fact, in a sense you could include even the head who belongs to the body but it is, I think you can see what I'm trying to do, I'm trying to draw these out to show you their relationships.

Now the relationships that exist I have put by means of the white and colored chalk lines. Those that are white relate to the discipline or the ruling of the elders. That is, the under shepherds or elders are under Christ and in turn the servants, the gifted men, the believers, are under the guidance of the under shepherds or the elders. At the same time, however, the ministry that believers have within the body of Christ, one to another, is a ministry that is manifold and ranges in all direction. For example, the servants or deacons minister to the elders. They also minister to the gifted men. They minister, as well, to the body. The church itself ministers in the gifts which are not utterance gifts related to ministry, ministers to all. The gifted men minister to the elders, they minister to the deacons, they minister to the body of Christ and so on.

Now let's come back our organization and we talked just a few words last time about the headship of Christ over the church. Then also we said just a few words about the under shepherds or elders. And I want to pick that up today and as you, if you will,

to turn with me to 1st Timothy chapter 3, and I want to say a few more words about elders.

Some time ago I ran across a statement by Tom Taylor, professor at one of the theological seminaries in the United States. And he said, “That George Bernard Shaw once observed youth as a wonderful thing and it’s too bad it has to be wasted on young people.” And then someone offered a countering suggestion that old age is a time of great usefulness with accumulated knowledge and experience, but unfortunately it is wasted on some old grouches. And I hope that you will not think that elders necessarily have to be the grouches.

But let’s look now at 1st Timothy chapter 3 and remember last time I tried to point out these things. First of all, that the elder is also called a bishop. In other words, the term bishops and elders are synonymous in the Bible. Now I pointed you to Acts chapter 20, verse 17 and verse 28. In those verses, remember, Paul calls for the elders of the church at Ephesus. And then when they come together in the 28th verse he says, “Now take heed to the flock of God, over which the Holy Ghost hath appointed you overseers, (or bishops),” episkopos is the word. So that elders are bishops and bishops are elders. We also saw that in Titus chapter 1, verse 5 and verse 7. “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,” Paul tells Titus. And then he goes on in the 6th verse and says if anyone be blameless, the husband of one wife, having faithful children, not accused of riot or unruly, for a bishop must be blameless. In other words, “Titus, I want you to appoint elders, for a bishop must be blameless.”

Now elder and bishop are synonymous terms. The Bible knows nothing of a bishop over a territory or over a group of churches. This monarchical episcopate, as it is called by scholars, arose after New Testament times. You can see the beginnings of it in some of the church fathers such as Ignatius. In the New Testament the elder was a bishop and the bishop was an elder. Now the reason for the two terms is simply this, the

bishop is a term which means overseer and has to do with his work. That is, his duty is to oversee. Elder is a term that has to do with his dignity. He is to be a man of experience in the church of Jesus Christ. Now I went on also to say that even Bishop Lightfoot agreed with this and he was a bishop too.

Now today I want to talk for a few moments about the plurality of elders as rulers in the local church. The reason this is necessary is not because the New Testament is not clear on this point. As a matter of fact I've often run across statements like this in ecclesiological discussions. To merely state that the New Testament had a plurality of elders is all that's necessary because it's so obvious from the reading of the New Testament. However many people do not read the New Testament. That is, with regard to ecclesiology. They read it with regard to everything else but they never bother with this. And so consequently there are some who hold that the church really should be designated in this way; the head, Christ, and then under the head, the pastor, and then under the pastor, the deacons, and then under the deacons, the congregation. Now this is quite common. It's practiced quite widely, particularly in the South. Now if we do believe that this is really the order, the head Christ, then the pastor, then the pastor is absolute authority in the local church.

A few months ago I had some elders from a church in the Southeast come to visit me and they were very much concerned about the new man they had as pastor of their church. He had come – tell it not in Gath, publish it not in Ashkelon lest the uncircumcised Philistines hear -- he had come from Dallas Theological Seminary [laughter]. And he had the unfortunate opinion that the pastor was really the head of the church and he was logical. When the elder stepped out of line he disciplined them. If they stepped out of line, were not in agreement with him, then he said, “Now next Sunday morning I'm not going to allow you to make the announcements. I'm not going to allow you to observe the Lord's table, to assist in it.” That was very logical. Because, you see, whoever is the head of the church has the power of discipline and if the pastor

is the head of the church then he has the power of discipline. And so it is either this or plurality, because discipline pertains to the elders. And if the pastor is the only elder in the church as this particular ecclesiology maintains, then of course he has absolute authority.

Now let's look at what the New Testament says. We're going to look at just a few passages. And I want you to notice now the almost uniform reference to plurality among the officials or elders of the church. Let's look first at Acts chapter 20, and verse 17. Acts chapter 20, and verse 17, now Paul is drawing near to Miletus and when he arrives we read in verse 17, “And from Miletus he sent to Ephesus, and called the elders of the church.” The elders of the church, notice verse 28, “Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, (plural,) to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood.” That word to feed, by the way, means to shepherd. It was the duty of the elders to shepherd.

Let's turn to Philippians chapter 1, verse 1. Just notice the plural, Philippians chapter 1, in verse 1, Paul addresses the church. Philippians 1:1, page twelve fifty-seven in the Old Edition, “Paul and Timotheus, the servants of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi, with the bishops, (bishops equal elders, elders equal bishops,) with the bishops and deacons.” Notice the plural, bishops. By the way, wasn't it impolite of Paul to address a letter to the church at Philippi and neglect the pastor? To all the saints with the bishops and deacons.

1st Thessalonians chapter 5, and verse 12. Now you will notice that in these verses that I am going to read Paul mentions the word brethren twice but two different groups are in mind. Now notice, verse 12, here he addressed the congregation, “And we beseech you, brethren, to know them which labor among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you.” Did you see it? 1st Thessalonians 5:12? To the congregation, “I exhort you to know them which labor among you, to know them which are over you

in the Lord and admonish you, (plural, not him, them.) And to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake. And be at peace among yourselves.”

Now it has been the suggestion of some that perhaps this is the last resort of a weak theology but it has been suggested that perhaps there were different local churches in one area and there was one pastor over each one. And then you can have plurality in a city and yet individuality in one particular local church. I remind you that the church at Thessalonica had only been in existence just a few weeks when Paul wrote this epistle back to them. Surely not time for a multitude of local churches to arise in the city of Thessalonica. He says, “We beseech you, brethren, to know them which labor among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you; and to esteem them very highly.” Verse 14 he addressed the elders now,

“Now we exhort you, brethren, warn them that are unruly, comfort the feebleminded, support the weak, be patient toward all men. See that none render evil for evil unto any man; but ever follow that which is good, both among yourselves, and to all men. Rejoice evermore. Pray without ceasing. In everything give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ concerning you. Quench not the Spirit, (we'll have something about that later on.) Despise not prophesyings. Prove all things; hold fast that which is good.”

Will you turn to James chapter 5, verse 14. This is so plain I wonder why it's necessary to do this, but the reason is that there are over two million people in the state of Texas who have been taught otherwise. Verse 14, now look, “Is any sick among you? Let him call for the elders of the church.” The elders of the church, James 5:14. Let him call for the elders of the church, not call for an elder from this church and this church and this church and this church to pray, but for the elders of the church, the local church, its elders, its leaders.

Hebrews chapter 13, verse 7, "Remember them which have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God: whose faith follow, considering the end of their manner of life." Notice the plural, "Remember them which have the rule over you."

Verse 14, verse 17 I should say, "Obey them that have the rule over you." Verse 24, "Salute all them that have the rule over you, and all the saints. They of Italy salute you."

Now will you turn back to 1st Timothy chapter 3, and verse 1? In spite of all of this still we have the last gasp of a dying viewpoint in verse 2, 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," and we're told that you see here it appears in the singular, which means that we must have, or could have, one man over a church. Because in verse 8 it says, "Likewise must the deacons, (plural,) be grave." And so since we have plural in verse 8 for deacons and we have singular in verse 2 for bishop then why not one pastor who is an elder and bishop and many deacons over the church.

I would like for you to look at verse 1, "This is a true saying, if a man." If any one, not if any, plural, then he would say, "For bishops must be blameless." But he says, "If a man desires the office of a bishop, he desires a good work." A bishop because he's talking about one. If any one, consequently bishop in the singular. He's using it generically most likely.

Will you turn back to chapter 5, and verse 3? The writer of the pastorals rather likes generic singulars. Notice verse 3, "Honor widows that are widows indeed." Verse 4, "But if any widow," plural, singular, as he speaks about one particular one.

Now I've been kind of pulling your leg, you have probably guessed already that the polity that I have been in a friendly way attacking is Baptist polity. And since I'm going to attack everybody's polity we won't eliminate anyone. It is striking that this idea, that there is one man over the church as the pastor who has absolute authority was not believed by all the Baptists. As a matter of fact Augustus Hopkins Strong in his systematic theology acknowledges that while he leans to the one man authority in the local church

he acknowledges that it does seem that when the churches group they had plurality of elders.

Furthermore, there is evidence from other articles of faith published by Baptists in the early days in this country. That there was quite a bit of controversy over this question and that many of them originally believed in plurality of elders. I think in Believers Chapel on one of our Sundays we have put on the right-hand side of the page in our propaganda side of our bulletin, remember, we have put a little article by Mr. Prier which he spoke from time to time which sets forth that fact.

Now plurality then, I think we can leave that as far as the New Testament is concerned it teaches a plurality of elders who are leaders in the local church. What are their functions, what does an elder do? Now the New Testament sets forth these things, will you turn to the 4th chapter of 1st Timothy 4:14? Paul states to Timothy in a verse which perhaps we shall cover later on at its proper place, “Neglect not the gift that is in thee, which was given thee by prophecy, with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery, (or the eldership).” It is evident from this that it is the duty of the elders to recognize the gifted men in the local church. It is the duty of elders to observe, to listen to the ministry of the word and to recognize those who have been gifted by God with spiritual gifts. We shall talk about this later on, that’s one thing.

Then also we read that they are to shepherd the flock. Now in 1st Peter chapter 5, and verse 1, we read these words,

“The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder, (Peter says,) and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed. Feed the flock of God, (that word is the word shepherd. Shepherd the flock of God,) taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being examples to the flock.

And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away.”

The elders who do their job well have a special crown for them, a crown of glory. Now it's frequently taught that all believers may receive the crown of glory. There may be something like that for you but it is especially reserved for the elders. I lost a friend over this one time. After ten years now I've regained her, I think. But in one of the churches of Texas I made this comment and there was a woman who had been teaching child evangelism lessons for years and you know they have a lesson on the crowns. And this was one of the crowns which she had taught the children over and over and over again, the crown of glory. I said, “That belonged to elders, not to everybody.” And I lost her friendship for a long time. She was rather cold to me. But when I last saw her she had warmed up and I hope maybe she has eliminated that crown from her lesson to the children.

But elders have a special crown and their duty is to shepherd. Now to shepherd is a word that means to act like a shepherd. What does a shepherd do? Well a shepherd, of course, primarily leads the flock. He leads them, by the way, he does not feed them himself. Shepherds are not responsible for feeding, they're responsible for pasturage. They lead the sheep to the place where the sheep may feed themselves. It is the duty of elders, not necessarily themselves to do the feeding, because some of them do not feed. All are apt to teach but not all in the sense of the gifted men, but it's the responsibility of the elders to see that the church is fed by gifted men.

So the elders lead, the elders guard. Titus chapter 1 Paul tells us some very interesting things about elders, would you turn there for just a moment? Verse 9, I have to stop in five minutes because we're going to have a few questions. Verse 9 Paul says, Titus 1 as he addresses qualifications for an elders,

"Holding fast the faithful word as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers, (it's the duty of the elder to know the doctrine of the word of God and be able to exhort and also to be able to convince objectors.) For there are many unruly and vain talkers and deceivers, specially they of the circumcision: Whose mouths must be stopped, (that's the duty of the elders, a difficult duty too,) who subvert whole houses, teaching things which they ought not, for filthy lucre's sake. One of themselves, even a prophet of their own, said, the Cretians are always liars, evil beasts, slow bellies, (what do you think of a testimony of a Cretian who says all the Cretians are liars? Well that's a problem for that text and we'll pass it by. But here,) This witness is true. Wherefore rebuke them sharply, (the elder,) that they may be sound in the faith."

So the elders then are to lead. That is, they are to shepherd, govern. They are to guard, they are to discipline. So to lead, to guard, to discipline: to lead the flock, to guard them against intrusion from outside, false teaching, any other way the flock or sheep may be plundered, by wolves. And finally, to discipline where the sheep need it.

Now under leading is included a number of things. I think pasturing we read in James, if anyone is sick let them call up the elders of the church. The elders should be praying men who can pray for those who are sick. The elders are to have responsibility for finances. This may shock you so I'll ask you to turn with me to Acts chapter 11, verse 30. You remember that in the early church there was quite a lot of giving to the poor in Jerusalem. We read in verse 29 of Acts chapter 11, "Then the disciples, every man according to his ability, determined to send relief unto the brethren which dwelt in Judea: Which also they did, and sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul."

So it is the elders who have ultimate authority in the matter of finances. Perhaps that's why they are exhorted by Peter to take the oversight willingly, not of necessity, not for filthy lucre's sake. Now one final text which I think is important for us, will you turn

to 1st Timothy chapter 5, and verse 17. Boy, time really flies. 1st Timothy 5:17. That is, for me.

1st Timothy 5:17, now Paul says, “Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially they who labor in the word and doctrine.” All elders rule, some rule well. Some also labor in the word and doctrine. Not all, which in itself shows that there were some elders who were not preachers. Some elders do not have the gift of pastor-teacher, but some elders may. Consequently the Presbyterian distinction between the teaching elder and the ruling elder is in my opinion a justifiable one. So that the elders then are those who lead, who guard, who discipline. All of them are to be apt to teach, as Paul states. Every one of them should be able to sit down with any Christian and instruct them in the doctrines of the faith, man to man. Lead them to Christ, build them up in the faith. Should never have an elder who doesn't know the Bible from cover to cover, in our terms, you know. He should be a man of the word of God. Not necessarily, however, a man who stands behind the pulpit and is able to maintain a teaching ministry of that type. That's the gift of teaching or the gift of pastor teacher. These are gifted men. Sometimes the elder has the gift, sometimes he does not.

The qualifications for elder are set forth in 1st Timothy chapter 3, verses 1 through 7. One last thing I want to say before we say just one more word about deacons and then we're going to stop. Often in our churches we have tenure for elders. In other words an elder serves for two years or three years or four years and then he's off the board of elders for awhile. And then he may be elected again and so on. That is not according to Scripture.

Now the reason this arose is because elders were not willing to do what they should have done. If there is an elder who is not eldering then the elders should speak to the elder. Don't receive accusation against an elder except before two or three witnesses Paul says in 1st Timothy 5. But when he is not doing his duty the elders should speak to him.

The idea of having a rotation system was designed to drop out unfaithful elders in the easiest possible way but it was a shirking of the duty that is laid at the feet of the elders and they are responsible for. In the Bible we read nothing of a man serving for one year or two years or three years. An elder is an elder as long as he continues to exercise his ministry acceptably and no accusations are brought against him.

Now deacons, just briefly, not because they're not important, deacons are to be spiritual men. Deacons in the New Testament are the assistants of the elders. I think this is evident from several things. Number one, their name deacon means a servant. They have no teaching duties. If you will notice 1st Timothy chapter 3, verse 8 through verse 12. No teaching duties, no governing duties. So no teaching, no governing duties, and yet their name indicates that they are servants. I would gather from this that it is the duty of the deacons to do as unto the Lord anything that the elders feel should be done as unto the Lord. And it is possible for elders to delegate to deacons financial responsibilities, property responsibilities, responsibilities in the carrying out of the activities of the local church. Such things as the nursery, ushering, conduct of greetings, care of property, etcetera. Anything that the elders may desire; visiting the sick, aiding the sick financially, and so on. The deacons responsible and also undoubtedly ultimately this was designed to be perhaps a training for the ultimate office of elder.

Now we have just a moment, are there any questions? I hope you'll free to ask questions. I would like, by the...Yes sir.

[Question from the audience]

[Johnson] The answer to that I think will appear - will come out as we go on. Let me just state this, the apostles were gifted me. Their office faded into the office of elder when they stayed in a locality. Later on, for example, John and Peter call themselves elders, they were apostles. So in that case it is entirely possible that the apostle Paul

served as one of the elders in that local church. He is, however, an apostle. He is called a prophet or a teacher in the passage, remember, in Acts 13. There were five prophets and teachers and one of them was Paul. So his recognized there as a man who had the gift of teaching. Nothing is said about him being an elder or even an apostle in that particular place. But that will come out I think as we all...Yes sir?

[Question from the audience]

[Johnson] The question is, what is the place of an evangelist? The evangelist belongs here, he is one of the gifted men. Yes sir.

[Question from the audience]

[Johnson] Yes, what is the distinction between teaching and ruling elder, expand. The only thing that is stated about this specifically is 1st Timothy 5:17 where Paul says, “Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of honor, especially those that labor in the word and doctrine.” So all the elders rule, some of them labor in the word and doctrine. Hence, some of them apparently have the gift of teaching or the gift of pastor teacher in addition to having been appointed by God to the office of elder.

[Comment from the same audience member]

[Johnson] There could be - of course there could be always - no, no more authority.

[Comment from the same audience member]

[Johnson] He may have the gift of teaching. In other words, he may exercise the gift of ministry. In fact, in the local church if there was one gifted man then he should administer the word. But then he was not the authority of the church, even then the authority was in the plurality of the elder. So one man ministry is permissible provided there is only one gift, but if several gifts then there should be opportunity for the ministry of several gifts. But in all circumstances it is the elders who exercise leadership in the local church.

[Question from the audience]

[Johnson] Question is, where did Titus fit in? Titus did not fit in for the simple reason that Titus was an apostolic legate, as Timothy. By the way, this is not my - this is the opinion of most students of the New Testament. He was an assistant to an apostle. Consequently Paul sent him to this place to this and sent Timothy to this place to do another. That term, by the way, apostolic legate comes from Lenski who was a Lutheran.

[Comment from the same audience member]

[Johnson] Yes sir. Now you'll notice the seminary member, I'm not so much interested in you fellows who have got such technical questions that the average person in the audience might not even be interested in. I'm especially interested in some of you who are not seminary students who may have some problem. Yes sir, there is one there [Laughter]. You fellows can ask me any time.

[Question from the audience]

[Johnson] [Laughter] Is Mr. Prier here? [Laughter] Not here? Question is, if tenure is not involved what do we mean by acting elder? I wish I could answer that question. Now seminary questions [Laughter]. We've had quite a lot of fun over this and I'll be perfectly frank, the reason we have is this; as far as we know we do not know anything in the New Testament that covers a church that is begun without any antecedents. And so for five years we have called ourselves acting elders because we didn't know exactly how to advance to acting to elder [Laughter].

If, however, we had apostolic succession, in other words, if Paul had come into our midst and he had appointed Mr. Prier primary elder then we wouldn't have had any problem. The difficulty is that the New Testament does not ever, anywhere, subscribe for the idea of the congregation, electing anyone. And so apparently elders were as Acts 20, verse 28 says, “Take heed of the flock of God, over the which the Holy Ghost hath appointed you elders overseers.” It is God the Holy Spirit who appoints, it is the saints who recognize the appointment in the fact that they do the work of an elder. Now frankly as far as I'm concerned I call Mr. Prier, for example, an elder because he does the work of an elder and I esteem him highly in the Lord for his work's sake, as Paul said.

But I must confess, I have a little difficulty getting over that, from acting to Elder. Perhaps one of these days we'll just take the bit in our hand and say, “We're elders,” and then you can come and say, “I don't think you are.” [Laughter] Time's up, we'll pick it up next time from this place. Let's close with a word of prayer.

[Prayer] Father we thank Thee for the privilege of the study of New Testament...

**[RECORDING ENDS ABRUPTLY]**