



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

The Local Church

“Its Meetings and Ministry”

TRANSCRIPT

[Prayer] Father, again we ask for the guidance of the Holy Spirit as we turn again to the Scriptures to understand the subject of the local church. We thank Thee that Thou hast said that it is the pillar and ground of the truth. And we pray that as a result of our studies we may come to understand the place that it has in the thoughts of our God and our savior Jesus Christ, who stated as one of his chief works the building of the local church and also of the church universal through faith in him who was to die. And so now we commit our class to Thee and ask again for Thy help. In Jesus' name. Amen.

[Message] We are studying the local church in the New Testament and we have considered its organization, we have considered its spiritual gifts, its priesthood, its ordinances, and now today we are to look at its meetings. And then we hope to conclude with a discussion of its ministry and its discipline.

Believers Chapel is committed to the principle that the choice of one's church is very important and is to be decided by an appeal to the word of God. Human standards are not standards that are acceptable in the choice of a local church. We do not choose our local church because it is the church in which our family has served. We do not choose the local church by reason of its size because it is big and influential, or because it

is small and insignificant and we might find a place there. We do not choose our church because our children like it better than other churches, which to me seems one of the weakest of all human standards. We do not choose it because it affords more opportunities for us than some other church. We do not choose it because it is the friendliest church which we have tried: all of these are human standards for the selection of a local church.

You often see in the newspapers, sometimes over the radio and TV here, “Go to the church of your choice.” Now that may be very good for a person who does not want to appeal to a divine standard, but it seems obvious that it is a human standard; that we really should seek out a church which is in accordance with the Scriptures in what it proclaims and in how it ministers that message. We would not think of choosing our gospel on the basis of these human standards. We would not choose that which is our means of salvation by human reckoning, why then is it that we must stoop to human standards in the choice of a local church?

Now we had been trying to set forth these principles of church order. A New Testament order is just as plain as the plan of salvation. It is just as evident from the study of the New Testament the principles whereby the local church is to be guided and by which it is deserved as is the gospel of the message of the Lord Jesus itself. And if you have any question about that any time I'd be glad to point out to you the reason why that statement is absolutely true.

But we have been setting forth these principles primarily; government of the local church is by a plurality of elders, government of the local church is not by one man whatever he may be called. Government is by plurality of elders. Ministry of the word in the local church is by gifted men, singular or plural depending upon the gifts that God gives to the local church. He may give one, two, five, but he also may give just one. And, of course, it is even theoretically conceivable, I say this for a seminary student

primarily, that there not even be one in the local church at one particular time so far as the New Testament is concerned.

Thirdly, not only is government by plurality of elders and ministry by gifted men, priesthood is to be exercised by every believer. And in the meetings of the local church, in the collective priesthood of the local church, all priests who are males are allowed to participate. Now priests should not teach if they do not have the gift of teaching, but priests may participate; a word of praise, a word of prayer, a word of thanksgiving, a word of testimony. Gifted men may exercise their gift; teaching, exhortation, pastor-teacher as the case may be.

Now we also have been saying implicitly, and I think probably definitely in one or two cases at least, that in order to have an effective application of these principles that we must have at least once a week a meeting of the local church in which the ministry and the priesthood is carried on under the direction of the Holy Spirit. That is, we must have a Spirit led, open meeting if we are to effectively practice the principles. That if we do not have such a meeting and other meetings are certainly permissible, but if we do not have such a meeting then we cannot practice the principles of the New Testament. Corporate priesthood can only be exercised when the whole body is together. Ministry of gifts to the whole congregation can only be exercised when the whole congregation is together and so consequently necessary to these principles is a meeting once a week in which we are led by the Spirit in our worship and in our ministry.

Now I should say at this point, but we will say this later on, that if we do not permit this then we are guilty of the exhortation which is addressed to the Thessalonians by the Apostle Paul, quenching the Spirit. For quenching the Spirit is not an exhortation or command addressed to the individual in his individual life, but it is addressed to the individuals in their corporate church life. All you have to do is look at the context in that passage to see that.

Now then, any church which violates these principles is in this respect unacceptable. Now let me hasten to say I hope some of you visitors you'll realize that when I say this I do not mean that they are not good churches that preach the gospel of Jesus Christ, we do not practice these principles. I think they would be better churches if they did. If I didn't think that I wouldn't bother to give you these messages but I want to hasten to say that I do not have a feeling of enmity in my heart towards a church that does not see what I think the New Testament teaches but any church that violates these principles does not allow them to be operated is in so doing not measuring up to the highest that God has for it. Now in matters not specifically commanded by the New Testament the principle apostolic practice, is apostolic precept, ism generally speaking valid and acceptable. In other words, if we do not have a precise word on some points but we know that the apostles practiced a certain thing then, as Paul tells us in 1st Corinthians chapter 4, his example is to guide us. And so therefore in matters not specifically set forth apostolic principle or practice is ordinarily apostolic precept. I think there are some exceptions to this but this is the general guide.

And furthermore, I think after at least -- I hate to tell you how old I am in a local church -- but after over twenty-five years of observation I have seen very few of the apostolic practices that are not valid for today. And furthermore, generally speaking the most workable spiritually are principles but there are exceptions and I'm willing to grant that it's alright to shake hands instead of greeting one another with, “An holy kiss,” as the apostle told the Corinthians. But you know, come to think of it, there may be something really worthwhile about that in the sense that it expresses the sense of love and affection that the early church had one for another. So I'll admit that but nevertheless in general that's the principle. Now today we're coming to the church meeting and what I want to do in the time we have is to discuss the origin of the New Testament church meeting because I think it throws light on the meeting and why it was carried on as it was, discuss

a few things about its organization and, finally, set forth some things that are characteristics of the New Testament church meeting.

Now I want you, if you will, to take your New Testaments and turn with me to Luke chapter 4 as we begin our discussion of the origin of the New Testament church; Luke chapter 4. Now you remember that when the Lord Jesus began his public ministry he began it in the synagogue at Nazareth according to Luke, and we read in verse 14,

“And Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit into Galilee: and there went out a fame of him through all the region round about. And he taught in their synagogues, being glorified of all. And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up: and, as his custom was, he went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and stood up for to read. And there was delivered unto him the book of the prophet Esaias. And when he had opened the book, he found the place where it was written, (now there follows the citation from Isaiah chapter 61, and notice the 20th verse,) And he closed the book, and he gave it again to the minister, (which, of course, means the servant. The Hebrew word was *sharath*, he was the attendant, really,) and sat down.”

Now I want you to turn with me to Acts chapter 13, verses 14 and 15, Acts chapter 13, verses 14 and 15. In the context of this passage is Paul's sermon in the synagogue at Antioch in Pisidia, and we read in Acts chapter 13, and verse 15,

“But when they departed from Perga, they came to Antioch in Pisidia, and went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and sat down. And after the reading of the law and the prophets the rulers of the synagogue sent unto them, saying, Ye men and brethren, if ye have any word of exhortation for the people, (speak up,) say on.”

Now let's stop for a moment and what I want to say is very simple and I can say it, I think, very quickly. It seems obvious from the way in which the early church conducted its meetings that many of the principles whereby they were guided were principles derived from the meeting of Israel in their synagogues. Now let me for a moment remind you of the organization of the synagogue. The synagogue was an organization for the reading and study of the law as well as for worship and praise. There was a man, generally speaking, who was a layman who was the leader or ruler of the synagogue. He did not do the preaching, he was really responsible for the activities that took place in the synagogue itself to the end that they went orderly and in a seemly manner. It was his responsibility to select those who would read the law and the prophets, and also to select those who would offer the prayers on the coming Saturday.

In other words, he was an organizational leader selected from among laymen to carry out this responsibility. The worship in the synagogue itself was carried on by many people. For example, when they came together the first thing that the congregation did was to have a prayer collectively and then a certain man appointed by the ruler of the synagogue would lead in the weekly prayers. There was always repeated the Shemoneh or the eighteen petitions. As a matter of fact, Israelites were expected to repeat those every day if they were godly Israelites. And then after this there was the reading of the Mosaic law and someone had been selected to do this, some other one. And after the reading of the Mosaic law there was the reading of the prophets and generally speaking after the reading of the prophets an exposition by someone. Now the exposition; the expositor was either chosen by the leader of the synagogue and he differed week after week, or he was someone who was present who had the ability to do it. We would say today in New Testament terminology you had the spiritual gift. And then that meeting closed with a benediction.

Now you can see from this that there was no one man over the services in the synagogue who carried out all of the responsibilities, who lead in prayer, who preached,

who gave the benediction. In other words, there was multiple participation in the synagogue and it was obvious that out of this there grew a New Testament church meeting in which there was no one man in the service who had the responsibility for the meeting. It was under the direction of the Holy Spirit and individuals who had the spiritual gift who could expound the Scriptures were free to exercise the gift, those who were priests were free to get up and offer praise and prayer. So I think it is obvious and I believe that almost all New Testament scholars agree that the origin of the New Testament church meeting is to be traced to the synagogue meetings.

Now you see, the Lord Jesus when he came in the synagogue at Nazareth, read from the prophets. Now he was not a trained rabbi, as a matter of fact they said about him, “How knoweth this man letters never having learned?” But he was recognized as a gifted man, a man who had the gift to expound the Scriptures. Now when the Apostle Paul in Barnabas came to the synagogue in Antioch in Pisidia and they walked in that synagogue that morning and the synagogue service, when the time came for the exposition of the Scriptures the rulers, plural, of the synagogue, apparently a large one, the rulers of the synagogue looked out, saw the strangers present and said to them, “If you have a word of exhortation feel free to express it in our meeting.”

In other words, there was freedom of utterance in the meeting and so the Apostle Paul got up and gave them that wonderful sermon. Now wouldn't it have been a very weary service that morning in Antioch in Pisidia if there had been one reverend Dr. Akiba who was the minister that day and who preached even though Paul and his friends were in the meeting? Well now you can see from this that out of this there grew the New Testament church meeting in which spiritual gifts and priesthood were recognized. Now, of course, the New Testament church meeting was not completely patterned by the synagogue, other things are true of the New Testament meeting which were not true of the synagogue, but this was undoubtedly its origin, the synagogue meeting.

Now let's move on to the organization of the local church. Now I wish we had time to read such passages as Acts chapter 2, verse 42, verse 46, Chapter 5:42, all of 1st Corinthians chapter 11, and chapter 14. Probably the principle passages are 1st Corinthians chapter 11, verses 17 through 20, verse 33, and chapter 14 in its entirety. But let's just look at a couple of places because I think if we do you will understand a little better some of the things that I'm going to say but I don't want to hold myself to just these passages because we're trying to cover the subject doctrinally and it's not possible to read all of the passages that do pertain to it.

1st Corinthians chapter 11, and verse 17, I want you to notice as I read that there is an expression that occurs more than once and the reason that I want you to notice this is because it is an expression that marks out these things that Paul is saying as pertaining to the church meeting. 1st Corinthians chapter 11, and verse 17,

“Now in this that I declare unto you I praise you not, that ye come together, (now that is the word, to come together, that's the word that was used of the church gatherings,) That ye come together not for the better, but for the worse. For first of all, when ye come together in the church, I hear that there be divisions among you; and I partly believe it, (I wholly believe it,) For there must be also heresies among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest among you. When ye come together therefore into one place, this is not to eat the Lord's Supper. For in eating every one taketh before other his own supper: and one is hungry, and another is drunken, (off of Welch's grape juice [laughter]).”

Now I want you to notice the word, “Come together.” Come together, that's the word that marks the meeting of the church, will you turn over to chapter 14 and verse 23? “If therefore the whole church be come together into one place, and all speak with tongues, and there come in those that are unlearned, or unbelievers, will they not say that

ye are mad?” Now we needn’t talk about the tongues now, I want you to notice the expression, “The whole church be come together.” Notice also verse 26, “How is it then, brethren? when ye come together, every one of you hath a psalm, hath a doctrine, hath a tongue, hath a revelation, hath an interpretation. Let all things be done unto edifying.”

Now you’ll notice the characteristic expression for the meeting of the church is, “When ye come together.” In other words, it was a gathering of a group of believers all in one place. Now let me just tick off a few things because the characteristics of the meeting are the most important things that I want to stress. And these things are really perhaps, at least in my opinion, not quite as important. When did the church meet? Well as far as we can tell from 1st Corinthians chapter 16, and verse 2, and Acts 20, and verse 7, the local church met on the first day of the week. On the first day of the week the disciples came together to break bread. Paul tells them in 1st Corinthians chapter 16 that, “They are to lay by them in store on the first day of the week as God has prospered them.” So they met on Sunday, our Sunday: the reason being that it was on the first day of the week that the Lord Jesus had appeared to them as the risen Messiah. John chapter 20, verse 17, verse 26, these verses point out that Jesus appeared to them on the first day of the week. And so they made this tremendous transformation from the seventh day to the first day because it was the day of the resurrection. It was the day when Jesus met with his disciples.

Now this is rather striking because on that first day they met to break bread. Why did they do that? Well it seems evident that it was very important for them. As a matter of fact in the New Testament Peter, when he preaches in the 10th chapter, makes reference to the fact that Jesus ate with them. The 1st chapter of the Book of Acts stresses the fact that Jesus appeared while they were eating, or while they were taking salt, the Greek probably means there. Your English text is a mistranslation at that point. Now you see, Jesus had told them that he would not eat or drink wine with them until he drank it new with them in the Kingdom of God. In other words, he promised them that a

kingdom was coming and that there would not be another observance of the Lord's Supper in the material way in which he had observed it with them on the last night until that kingdom came.

But they were exhorted to meet together and to take the elements which were representative of him and what he had done and to eat together, why? Well because it was an anticipation of the kingdom to come. It looked back toward the cross and it looked on toward the kingdom. And consequently on the first day of the week, the day of the resurrection, they met and they looked back to the cross, they looked on to the time when Jesus would reign in the kingdom and interim they met as believers in fellowship with the risen Christ. They met with him, that's why it was on the first day of the week; because he was the risen savior. They did not occupy themselves truly with this, they occupied themselves with this as well as this and you will discover in 1st Corinthians 11 as you read that these three things are stressed: it is a remembrance of him, it is to be exercised until he comes, and it is a communion of all the believers with the Lord and with one another. A representation of the church waiting for the coming King, so the time was the first day of the week. Every first day of the week was Easter Sunday for the early church, and that's what it should be for us.

Secondly, the place of meeting; now as you study the Book of Acts, and I'll say a little bit more about this next time, the early church went to the temple for testimony but they met in homes largely for worship. These two patterns you can discern as you observe their service. The people, the whole community, we read in chapter 14, “Met together in one place,” now on the first day of the week. As a matter of fact separate meetings seemed to be frowned upon by the early believers. And you can sense this in the men who follow the New Testament. Ignatius for example, several places in his letters stresses the fact that the whole church is to come together in one place; that is, that separate meetings in which a little group met over here, perhaps even calling themselves

a church, that was frowned upon. So the whole church met together in one place, all the believers.

The supervision: now the supervision of the local church was ultimately in their meetings God the Holy Spirit but through the elders. Now that is evident that last little stricture because in 1st Thessalonians chapter 5, in the instructions that are given the Apostle Paul directs questions to the elders and says to them that they are not to quench the Spirit. If someone gets up in the meeting and says something that they don't like they are not to stifle him. The way to stifle him affectively is to appoint someone as the minister of the church. That stifles spiritual gifts. And soon, it wasn't very long, there were people who rose in the local church and said, “You know, it would be much better if Stephanos did all of the preaching. If he did all the preaching we would really be blessed. But to have some of these others get up who are new comers and neophytes and have them speak, that's bad, we don't like that, we know far more than they do. So let Stephanos do it all.” Now that is biblically quenching the Spirit. The freedom of the meeting is gone, development of spiritual gift is gone, and finally we have the ecclesiastical hierarchy that we often see today in our meetings. So the supervision of the meetings was God the Holy Spirit, not a minister but God the Holy Spirit through human elders.

The primary purpose of the local church meeting was the Lord's Supper; that was the goal, I perhaps should put it that way, that was the goal. The goal was the Lord's Supper which looks back to these meals with the risen Messiah and anticipates the promised messianic banquet. Now you think, of course, that when I say the early church met first day of the week and they recognized that one of the goals of that meeting was the Lord's Supper, that this is something unique. Yes it is unique today, unfortunately. You can see a remnant of it and I think a false remnant of it in the Roman Catholic Church's practice of the mass on Sunday. That, however, is a relic of an original correctness in Bible doctrine that the early church did meet on the first day of week and

they did have the Eucharist, or the Lord's Supper and while it has now been perverted so that in the sacrifice of the mass there is a denial of the doctrine of the once and for all work of Jesus Christ. The practice itself reflects apostolic practice but I don't appeal to the Roman Catholic Church, I appeal to men like Calvin. John Calvin said in the institutes that the Lord's Supper should be observed, quote, “Very frequently and at least once in every week.” John Calvin, the patron saint of all Presbyterians.

John Wesley led the early Methodist societies in the observance of the Lord's Supper every Sunday, Wesley; the Methodists. Charles Haddon Spurgeon, the patron saint of all good Baptists, said, “Shame on the Christian church that she should put it off to once a month, they who once know the sweetness of each Lord's day celebrating his supper will not be content, I am sure to put it off to less frequent seasons.” Oscar Cullman, Professor of New Testament at the University of Basel and also at the Sorbonne in a recent book, fairly recent, on the early Christian worship has pointed out that there was no meeting in the early church in which there was not an observance of the Lord's Supper. Now some disagree with it but very few would disagree with the fact that the Lord's Supper was ordinarily the goal of the meetings of the local church. The ultimate aim of the meetings of the local church was edification as 1st Corinthians 14:26 says. And the atmosphere was the magnetic field of the Holy Spirit, as someone has put it.

Now let me finally say just a few words about the characteristics of the meetings then. And the first characteristic that I want to mention is freedom for the exercise of spiritual gifts. Freedom for the exercise of spiritual gifts, now will you look at that passage in 1st Corinthians chapter 14, and verse 26? 1st Corinthians 14:26 says,

“How is it then, brethren? when ye come together, every one of you hath a psalm, hath a doctrine, (teaching,) hath a tongue, hath a revelation, hath an interpretation. Let all things be done unto edifying. If any man speak in an unknown tongue, let it be by two, or at the most by three, and that by course; and let one interpret. But if there be no

interpreter, let him keep silence in the church, (after all, edification is the aim,) and let him speak to himself, and to God. Let the prophets speak two or three, and let the other judge. If any thing be revealed to another that sitteth by, let the first hold his peace. For ye may all prophesy one by one, that all may learn, and all may be comforted.”

So in the local church there was freedom for the exercise of spiritual gifts: prophesy, tongues, teaching specifically set forth. Now we need not, I say, discuss the question of the temporary character of prophesy and tongues, if you want to know why I think they are temporary come see me. There are some, however, who have said because some of these gifts are temporary in 1st Corinthians 14, therefore the type of meeting is temporary. Now that is a non sequitur of course, and the very fact that there are some gifts that are permanent in this chapter should, of course, have shown you that that kind of reasoning is not acceptable but I mention it because there are some who have been carried away by that false type of reasoning. Now someone says at this point, “Well then in your meetings anyone can speak.” Well yes, anyone can speak in the meeting of the church, any male, but while everyone can speak not everyone ought to speak, necessarily. In other words, what we speak is to be initiated by the Holy Spirit. And while everyone who can speak not everyone may speak, only those guided by the Spirit take part.

Now if that puts a great stress upon you to try to find the mind of the Holy Spirit then, of course, you have to go back and learn the very first principles of the Christian life, don't you? Because if as a Christian we do not yet know how to find the mind of the Holy Spirit for us how is it possible for us to live our lives day by day?

I read a story a few years back of George Goodman who went with a friend of his to a church in which they had one man as the minister. And when they came out the other man spoke to Mr. Goodman, and he was a very godly, elderly man, he said, “Mr. Goodman, I'm very much disturbed about our church.” He said, “The young seminarian

who spoke this morning gave us a message that was sound in doctrine but it did not meet the needs of our church and I'm very, very much concerned because we do need some ministry that meets our particular needs and that did not.” Mr. Goodman said, “But it seems to me if that's the case then you should have been the speaker this morning because you understood the needs of the church and you could have ministered to them in a way that would have met their needs if this be so.” And he said, “Ah Mr. Goodman, that would never do.” “But why should it never do?” “Merely because we have organized our churches in such a way that there is no opportunity for the Spirit of God to move one in our meetings who may have the word of exhortation that we especially need.”

So there was freedom for the exercise of spiritual gifts. Will you turn over to 1st Thessalonians chapter 5 and let me read this passage? 1st Thessalonians chapter 5 and verse 18, now the apostle had addressed the members of the congregation in verses 12 and 13 and then in verse 14 he had addressed the elders. Now you can notice that if you just observe the two verses and the mention of brethren, “And we beseech you, brethren, to know them which labor among you, and are over you in the Lord, (the elders).” Now verse 14, “Now we exhort you, brethren, warn them that are unruly, comfort the feebleminded, (this is addressed to the elders).”

Now among their exhortations from Paul is the 18th verse, “In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you. Quench not the Spirit.” Now this is almost always expounded as a reference to the individual. Dr. Schaefer at Dallas Seminary used to tell us that this exhortation had to do with an individual. He said, in his systematic theology, and this was what he used to tell us in class, “The Spirit is grieved when sin occurs and remains unconfessed. The Spirit is quenched when the Christian resists or rejects the will of God for him.” Now I do not question the use of that terminology, it's certainly useful to say that the Spirit is quenched when we resist the will of God for us but that isn't what Paul is talking about here. Did you notice the context?

“Quench not the Spirit. Despise not prophesyings. Prove all things; hold fast that which is good.”

Fausset has a much better interpretation, he says, “Do not throw cold water on those who under the Spirit’s extraordinary inspiration speak with tongues, reveal mysteries, or pray in the congregation.” It’s obvious that quench not the Spirit is an exhortation addressed to the elders; that they are not to stifle the utterances of the Holy Spirit. Almost every commentator who has looked at this in context and all of the best commentators have come to the conclusion that this really ought to be translated something like this, “Quench not the manifestations of the Spirit.”

Now when you quench a fire, how do you quench a fire? Do you quench it from outside the fire or from inside the fire? Well it’s obvious you quench it from outside, you throw dirt on it to quench the fire so that the quenching is an operation from the outside of the fire and it is addressed to the elders and they are told specifically not to stop the utterances of men in the assembly because they don’t like what they hear.

Some time ago we had someone in our meetings who objected to some of the seminary students getting up. Every now and then the seminary students would say something was just a little bit off base. Now generally speaking what they said was true but they would say some rather odd things and every now and then we’d have to call in the men before the elders after the meeting and say, “We think that what you said tonight was unacceptable for this reason. Or we think what you’ve been saying recently has not been edifying and therefore we caution you to keep silence for a little while,” we’ve done that. You see, in the final analysis it is the supervision of the elders that determines the effectiveness of the meeting of the saints.

But now the fact that someone utters something that is not completely in accord with the will of God does not mean he is to be quenched. Notice what Paul says, “Despise not prophesyings. Prove all things. Hold fast that which is good.” In other words, there is a selection to be made under the inspiration of the Spirit. We must take

care to remember that some are immature. Almost all seminary students are immature. Now that doesn't pertain to [name redacted] and that doesn't pertain to one or two others, but almost all seminary - that doesn't pertain to [name redacted] back in the back there. Who else in here is a seminary student [Laughter]. I don't know about some of them, I'm not going to pass judgment on them, but generally speaking that's true. And so we had someone who is very much upset because the seminary students got up and uttered something like that. But you see, how can they learn? Suppose I was stomped upon when I first began to talk. As I look back and look back at some of my notes I wonder, “My goodness, did I preach in this way then?” And I quickly put my notes in my wastepaper basket so no one will see it when I die, you know, look over these papers [Laughter]. We have to grow; we have to grow to maturity.

Well I'm not going to get through this if I don't hurry up. We could talk a lot about this, you know. This does not mean, of course, that a man who gets up in a meeting constantly and is a bore to the congregation should be permitted to do it. And it's the duty of the elders to go and say, “Look brother, we think that for awhile it would be good for you to exercise your priesthood and give thanks and pray and call out hymns but as far as teaching, why don't you keep quiet for a little while and learn a little perhaps. Maybe God will improve your gift.” You know, I've heard it said from one man that he went down deeper, stayed down longer, and came up dryer than any other man they'd ever heard. And there are some like that that plagued the congregation and it's the duty of the elders to say something about it. It's not an error in the New Testament setup that someone is allowed to do that. It is a sin when the elders don't do something about it, that's the key point.

Now there is also freedom for the exercise of priesthood. That's evident from 14:26 where he says that, “Some of them come and they have a psalm.” That is, they may call out a hymn. “They have a doctrine, they have a tongue, they have a revelation, they hath an interpretation, that all things be done unto edifying.” Also in this chapter there is

mentioned worship so that there was freedom for the exercise of priesthood. Now priesthood is different from teaching. Priesthood, remember is the offering of worship to God. I think our meetings in Believers Chapel suffer because the priests are dumb; that is, they don't speak when they should. A word of testimony is very useful. Something that God has done during the past week in your life is significant. In the early church I'm sure there were no dull meetings. There was a sense of contact with the Holy Spirit and their lives were lived under his direction and when they came together there was a lot of life in the meeting. I feel in Believers Chapel, this is my personal feeling, that our meetings have not yet near reached the New Testament practice. I feel that when we do reach that practice ultimately that you'll want to come to the evening morning more than you'll want to come to the morning meeting and the reverse is largely true now.

Now that is something for us to pray about and to be ashamed about because while there is this wonderful freedom we are not taking advantage of it. Then there is the necessity for edification, now that I have stressed here in verse 26, “That all things be done unto edifying.” Edification; that was one of the characteristics of the meeting. It's one of the tests of what goes on. If the saints are edified then the meeting is progressing according to the New Testament. If they are not, it is not.

One final thing, I don't have time to cover all of these things and I'll pick this up next time for a moment, there was a need for tranquility. I know that someone who has never been to this kind of meeting thinks, “Well if we have such a meeting as that it must be very much like the old holy roller meetings.” In other words, everybody can speak, we have rolling on the floor and laughing and shouting and crying and everything else. Did you notice the last verse of 1st Corinthians chapter 14, “Let all things be done decently and in order.” And did you notice also verse 33, “For God is not the author of confusion, (or tumult,) but of peace, as in all churches of the saints.” In other words, there is to be self-control in the meeting of the church.

Some years ago I was laboring out in Eagle Ford, community to the west of Dallas. You never thought I preached in a community like that, did you, but I did. And I worked among the people which were in those days some of the poorest economically in all of Dallas. I never will forget an interesting conversation I had with a man who was a Christian but who believed in speaking in tongues. And so I was a seminary student in those days and so I tried to egg him on a little, you know, ask him all of the details of it. I said, “How did you come to speak in tongues?” He said, “Well I tried for a long time and my wife, I had married, and she believed in the baptism but I didn’t have it. And I tried for a long time but I never could seem to get it. And finally one night in the prayer meeting the men separated and went into one room and the women separated and went into another and I got down on my knees and in the midst of my prayers I got it. And I began to speak in tongues.” I said, “Describe it to me.” He said, “Well I was just speaking along in tongues and said I was just carried away.” He said, “As a matter of fact, Lewis, I was so carried away that I said to myself as I was speaking in tongues I want to say the name Jesus.” He said, “You know, I couldn’t even say the name Jesus.” And I remembered a statement in 1st Corinthians 14, “The spirits of the prophets are subject unto the prophets.” Self-control was a characteristic of the early church. That kind of speaking in tongues, that kind of ecstatic speech is not speaking in tongues at all, according to the New Testament. It is the loss of one’s self-control.

Well time’s up. Perhaps we have just time for one or two questions. Any questions? You know, I think I speak with so much dogmatism that some of you are scared to ask a question. Now I don’t want you to feel that way, ask a question that’s on your mind, it may be on the minds of quite a few here. Alright, I have a seminary students who’s going to ask a question. [Name redacted]

[Question from the audience]

[Johnson] The question is, why did God apparently adapt the New Testament meetings to the form of the synagogue meetings. I do not want to give a false impression by what I said. I do not really think that God adapted the meeting after the order of the synagogue meetings. It is obvious that in the early church they did not do certain things that they did in the synagogue. But I think that it is also true that many of the things that existed in the synagogue worship were brought over into the New Testament worship. And I think also Paul, to point out another place where this was true, in the case of John the Baptist's baptism; now you remember that's nowhere referred to in the Old Testament. But it was practiced by the Jews and John adapted proselyte baptism to the baptism which he performed. And so I think that certain things that were carried on in the synagogue were allowed by God to be brought over into the meetings of the early church. And I would look at it rather along that line.

[Question from the audience]

[Johnson] That's a - it's a pure guess. I would think it's what - perhaps they knew best and which God felt was acceptable, obviously. And they practiced it. Like elders, we have no record in the New Testament of why the early church had elders, but we know they had elders in Israel and so that, too, was apparently brought over, permitted by God. So it's difficult, and I don't want to give - to point out anything more than that apparently was the pattern of many of the things that came to pass in the local church.

Well our time is up, we'll have to stop. Let's close with a word of prayer.

[Prayer] Father...

[RECORDING ENDS ABRUPTLY]

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