



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

The Local Church

“Summary: Advantages of New Testament Church Order”

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] This morning, the adults and the college kids are meeting in this hour to hear the last in our series of studies on the church and its principles and its local manifestation. This morning by the way before we begin, perhaps some of you noticed in the newspaper that there was a little article on page two I believe of the first section which says that the United Church of Christ and the Roman Catholic church are putting out together a book about the Bible and basic Christian beliefs and that teenagers from the protestant church represented by the United Church of Christ and the Roman Catholic church will be studying from the same textbooks very soon. The subject, Christian beliefs and biblical themes as they relate to social issues. And Herder and Herder, which is a well known publishing house for Roman Catholics has taken these books and has adapted them to Roman Catholic confirmation classes by making simple technical editorial changes such as substituting mass for worship service and priest for minister. And I suppose that almost everything else will be the same and work very well. I was interested in that because it is another of the many signs of a rapprochement between our liberal Protestants and the Roman Catholics.

Now this is the last of our series of studies in the local church, and we are going to study for our last time, “The Local Church: The Advantages of its Biblical Order.” Now

I know that some of you have thought as we have been studying the local church, that what I've been trying to tell you really is that there is no church on the face of the globe like Believers Chapel, [laughter] that no other church is really sound in its ecclesiology except ourselves. Now I have not really been trying to tell you that, in spite of the fact that it may have seemed that way. As a matter of fact, sometime ago, Howard Sugden, pastor of the South Baptist Church of East Lansing, or the North Baptist Church, I cannot remember if he was sound or unsound. But anyway, Mr. Sugden who is a very wonderful Christian man and a friend of mine said that in East Lansing there is a church with the name The Original Church of God Number Two. [Laughter] Perhaps they have heard of Believers Chapel. [Laughter] Seriously, I have not really been trying to get over that impression, even though it may have come through to you. However, I should be honest and tell you that it would be our desire to be that kind of church, but we do not have any illusions of ourselves, we do not think that we have yet measured up to what the New Testament has to say about the local church. But with this as a brief word of introduction to keep some of you from perhaps from thinking we have been too proud in our presentation of the New Testament church order, let me assure you that we do not think that we are the only church.

And furthermore, let us remember this to, that frequently, churches that are organized according to the New Testament principles are not necessarily blessed by God. They are blessed insofar as they are organized according to the New Testament principles but that does not ensure the blessing of God. It is very possible for a church to be disorganized scripturally, not organized according to the scriptural principles and be blessed of God because the individuals of that church within their hearts are seeking to know the mind of God and to carry out his will for them. It is possible to be in a scriptural framework in other words and to be dead as it possible to be spiritually. Now all things being equal, those who are alive spiritually will function best with the scriptural principles in mind and application, and I am thoroughly convinced of that. And so all

things being equal, we should seek to carry out the New Testament principles, recognizing that we fail, all of us in some measure and that when God blesses another organization which is not organized in accordance as we believe with the scriptural principles we should not be upset, and we should not think that perhaps our principles are wrong which we have discovered from the study of the word of God. But we should rather seek to acquire in our own local church that spirit of mind which seeks to do the will of God and to carry it out. And if we do, then we shall find that the framework of the New Testament principles is the most compatible framework with the gospel which is presented in the New Testament.

Now in our discussion of church order, we have been trying to point out these things. First, the New Testament order for the local church is just as plain as the plan of salvation. That is it is just as clearly seen from the study of the New Testament as the gospel is seen. It is not something abstruse, it is very simple. As a matter of fact, that is its characteristic, simplicity and it is seen very clearly if we will just spend a little time studying what the New Testament has to say about the local church. So that's the first thing that I've been trying to set forth. The reason I've been trying to set that forth is simply this that there are some who I think in an endeavor to escape the application of these principles say that the New Testament does not present us with any consistent church order. That is in my opinion, thoroughly wrong, and I think from the study of the New Testament and I hope you have seen it, it can be demonstrated to be wrong, the New Testament principles are as plain as day, if we will just seek them out. Plainer I say than the plan of salvation, and I'm not suggesting that that plan is not plain.

Secondly, we've been trying to say that the supreme principles in the application are government of the local church by a plurality of elders, ministry of the word by gifted men, not one necessarily, not several necessarily, but ministry by gifted men, however many may exist in the local church, thirdly, priesthood or this is really under supreme principles, priesthood, the priesthood of every believer, corporately should be a feature of

the local church. And necessary to an effective application of these principles of ministry by gifted men and the priesthood of every believer is the spirit led open meeting. Now we practice this once a week in Believers Chapel, there is nothing in the Bible that says that you could not have more than one meeting a week. The early church however settled into the practice of meeting once a week on the first day of the week in which they observed these principles. Now let me hasten to say when we say an open meeting, we do not mean that this meeting is open to man primarily, though it is open to the priests to exercise their priesthood, to the gifted men to give their ministry, but primarily we mean it is open to the Holy Spirit to control it. And so when we say open meeting, we mean a meeting in which the Spirit of God is free to communicate his mind to the local assembly through the gifted men. Now in too many of our churches we have the quenching of the manifestation of the Holy Spirit which is the meaning of 1 Thessalonians 5 and verse 19 as the context plainly shows.

Now we have said that in matters not specifically commanded, the principle apostolic practice is ordinarily apostolic precept, is generally valid and workable, even in the twentieth century. And in the last hour, we noticed from 1 Corinthians chapter 14 that adherence to church order is a definite test, not the test, but a definite test of spirituality. Will you notice chapter 14 and verse 37, now let me be sure you do not misunderstand me, I do not mean to say that if someone observes the New Testament principles for church order he is thereby spiritual, he may be very unspiritual. But according to Paul, if you do not recognize that these statements he makes in 1 Corinthians chapter 14 are the commandments of the Lord in which some of these principles are set forth, you cannot be spiritual. 1 Corinthians 14 and verse 37, “If any man think himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord.”

Now, the endeavor to execute the principles in an age of decline always brings opposition, persecution, and blessing too. Do you remember when Israel came back

from the captivity? Well when Cyrus made it possible for them to go back to the land in order to rebuild the foundations of the temple, they went back and the first thing that they discovered was that when you set out to go back to the word of God, lay again the old foundations which had been abandoned in Babylon, which could not be carried out in Babylon, you immediately discover that there is opposition. Now they discovered that the opposition came from several sources, and by the way, if you have your Bibles, you might turn to Ezra chapter 3 because I want to read you a note found in the new edition of the Scofield version. Now Ezra is in the Old Testament and in the new Scofield Bible it's page five hundred and thirty-six. And I want to read you the note at the bottom of the page, five hundred and thirty-six. Do you have it yet? Ezra chapter 3, and let's read the note, well I tell you what let's do, let's read verse 2 of Ezra chapter 3 and then let's read the note. Ezra chapter 3 verse 2, “Then stood up Jeshua the son of Jozadak, and his brethren the priests, and Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and his brethren, and builded the altar of the God of Israel, to offer burnt offerings on it, as it is written in the law of Moses the man of God.” In other words, they were seeking to go back to the Scriptures which had been abandoned. They came back, and everything was to be as the Scriptures said, the same principle is set forth in verse 4 and in verse 10. Now we need not expound Ezra, we don't have that time, so I'll just read the note of the Scofield Bible which sums it up I think very well.

“The people of the land sought to hinder the work in three ways. First, by seeking to draw the Jews into an unreal union verse 3, by weakening the hands of the people of Judah, verse 4 that is by discouraging them. And three, by accusations lodged with Ahasuerus, and Darius. The first was by far the most subtle and dangerous; the lives of Ezra and Nehemiah afford many illustrations of true separation.”

Now the thing I want you to notice is whenever you seek to apply the principles of the word of God, you can expect difficulty. When you became a Christian, was not that true if as is the case of many in this room, you were an adult when you became interested in spiritual things. The first thing that people began to say was on the one hand, “Well we’re very glad you’ve become interested in religion, I’ve always been interested in religion, we worship the Lord at our church too.” And you find yourself in a bind, because you know they don’t worship the Lord as you do, and yet it’s very difficult to get over the fact that the New Testament sets forth an exclusive salvation through Jesus Christ only. And you struggle through all of that experience bound up with John 14:6, “I am the way the truth and the life, no man cometh unto the Father but by me.” And you’ve had your friends say for example, “All of us are going to Heaven, we’re just going different ways,” Et cetera Et cetera Et cetera. Now that was the attempt to involve you in compromise.

Then of course with some it was opposition, so and so has gone off their rocker! They’ve gone around the bend. They’re absolutely fanatical about religion, and they begin to avoid you because you used to put tracts in their hands or give them books, tell them to read this, try to drag them to Bible class, or perhaps to your particular church where the gospel was preached.

And then they talked behind your back. They wouldn’t tell you to the face what they thought of you, but it came in after about three different transportations, it ultimately came to you that you were all off, that you had gone into one of these off brand churches, which was not true to the Bible at all. And you were sometimes called holy rollers or pentacostalist, or we don’t know what in the world kind of a church that is that they’re going to. You know that type of thing. Now all of that was inspired by the evil one desiring to throw you off the track, to get you submerged in something to prevent you from going on and growing in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Now the same thing works with every Bible doctrine that you appropriate for yourself. Every advance spiritually is always accompanied by opposition. And the same thing is true with regard to local church order. Now you don't have to come over to Believers Chapel more than about a month to discover that if you've got any Christian friends. Because it's not long before they say, "What in the world kind of a church is that? You mean they do not have any pastor, you mean to say that they observe the Lord's Supper and it's free for anyone to participate in once a week? What an odd kind of thing is that?" And so on. So you see that every advance is followed by opposition. Now sometimes, don't misunderstand it, because you have opposition, that doesn't necessarily mean you're in the will of God, sometimes you have opposition rightly, because you're off your nut, [Laughter] and you're not following the principles of the word of God. But sometimes when you know that you're following the principles of the word of God you get opposition. Don't be surprised, expect it. So, you can be sure that if you attempt to follow the principles of the New Testament, you will find opposition, no matter what that doctrine is. If it really means anything to you, you will find that it does not mean something to others.

Now this morning, I want to conclude with a very brief treatment of the subject the advantages of the biblical church order. And I want to answer these questions: Is the Scripture itself sufficient for salvation, but insufficient for church order? Are the New Testament principles as antiquated as the Stutz bearcat or the flying wedge? Now that didn't go off very well, because there are not many of you here over fifty! [Laughter] Or is there an impendent wisdom in them which if followed would save us from self constructed pitfalls?

Now first of all, the New Testament church principles discourage human glory. I'd like for you to turn to the Old Testament, and let me read a passage from Jeremiah chapter 9 which sets forth the principle found also in the New Testament in 1 Corinthians chapter 1. And that is that whatever we do is to be done to the glory of God. Jeremiah

chapter 9 and verse 23 and 24, Jeremiah chapter 9 verse 23 and 24. This by the way is a very excellent two verses, it wouldn't do you harm to memorize them. Thus saith the Lord, by the way before I read them, these verses meant a lot to the Apostle Paul because it is this section that he quotes in the 1st chapter of 1 Corinthians, and so he when he was in navigators training learned this verse.

“Thus saith the LORD, Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, nor let not the rich man glory in his riches: But let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the LORD who exercise lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness, in the earth: for in these things I delight, saith the LORD.”

Or as Paul puts it in chapter 1 of 1 Corinthians, “Let him that glory or glories in the Lord.” Let him that glories glory in the Lord. So the New Testament church principles discourage human glory for this reason. Most of our churches are like comets, they have a bright head and a long, flowing, nebulous tail. And most of our churches are very much like that. The pastor, with its autocratic system of one man government prevents us from seeing often the person who really is the head of the church, the Lord Jesus Christ, and it tends to exalt one man at the expense of the other members of the body of Christ. We look at the church of Christ which is a body and we see one giant mouth. But the rest of the members of the body, the arms, the legs the body are thoroughly undeveloped. Someone has said when you have one giant mouth, what you really have is a vacuum. But still it's true; the New Testament church principles discourage human glory. There is no one man who is responsible for the success of the local church.

Secondly, the New Testament church principles encourage the exercise of priesthood. Now we've talked a lot about this, so I'm not going to say much about it. But they encourage the corporate exercise of the priesthood. The best framework for

spiritual worship in the church is a framework in which the priests who carry on the worship of the local church have freedom to exercise their worship. Now ordinarily, in our churches today, when we fail to apply the New Testament principles and allow the priests to carry on the worship of the local church in a meeting led by the Holy Spirit, the result is that we turn to visible, material, mechanical substitutes, and in come the fig leaves of the circles, the bazaars, the presiding officers, the multiplication of committees, choirs, some of these things are necessary and good. I'm not saying anything specifically against the choir, it's entirely possible, that in some one church in this country there should be a choir that is ideal.

Mr. Spurgeon said that when the Lord kicked Satan out of Heaven he fell into the church choir. [Laughter] Others, my pastor friends around the country call it the war department of their church. Well now we all know that a good thing may become a bad thing. But what I'm speaking about is not that a choir is bad in itself. As you know in Believers Chapel we hope to encourage singing. I hope to see the day when the entire congregation is one giant choir; I think that would be a tremendous testimony to the glory of God. I would love to see the day when someone who really knew music and he knew how to communicate and to teach music to teach this entire congregation so that we not only wanted to sing, but it was a blessing to others to hear you sing. And I would long for that time, I would love to see when we get in our new building this carried out and maybe a year from now we would have a choir. Nobody in Believers Chapel -- not in the choir because we sing and we know what and how to sing -- but what I'm saying is that when we neglect New Testament principles, we frequently turn to the subordinate things, the inconsequential things, where as New Testament church principles encourage the corporate exercise of priesthood.

Now there is a great deal of benefit in having the worship of the church carried on by the priests, because you see, it lets us know what we really are. You would never know the condition of Believers Chapel if I did everything in Believers Chapel and if I

were in fellowship with the Lord always you'd say, “My isn't it wonderful over there.” Because you see you would be hearing a man of God in fellowship with God proclaiming the word of God and you couldn't help but sense the power of the Spirit in such a meeting. But what about the rest of the body? You would never know anything about them. And I remember when we first started having the open meeting at night and we're not, we've only begun to touch in my opinion what that meeting could become in the will of God. It's very poor at this point, I think, but I believe we are on the right track. But I remember I used to be very discouraged, because we would gather on Sunday night and just a few people participated, there were long silences, very long silences. And what was said and what was done was not very edifying in many ways. And I remember talking to Mr. Prier; he's not here today, so I can talk about him.

But I talked to Mr. Prier about it and I was very much discouraged and I spoke to him about the problem and he said, “Well you know, it seems to me that there is a good service in that kind of meeting.” I said, “What do you mean?” He said, “It lets us know what we really are like.” And it really does. It lets us know what we really are like. And when the worship drags, and when the Spirit of God is not present in the meeting, that's a message to us, there's something wrong; there's something that needs straightening out. Now in an ordinary meeting in which you have one man doing all the speaking led by the Spirit of God, you could never know anything about the condition of the saints. Oh, ordinarily, they'll be blessed by that ministry and cursed by ministry not in the will of God, but this meeting lets you know really what you are. And it's a very humbling experience to me at least as I shepherd in the flock as one of the shepherds here and discover that we're really not getting along very well. It's very discouraging and it causes you to go to the Lord in prayer.

Thirdly, New Testament church principles encourage gifted ministry. That isn't exactly how I've got it on my notes, but that gives the gist of it. Encourage the development of spiritual gift. It is good for the younger brethren to gather in a meeting in

which maybe God has given them a spiritual gift, and here is an opportunity for them to exercise their spiritual gift, under the supervision and under the oversight of the elders. We've had a number of the seminary fellows in our meeting say things and we've had to draw them aside and say afterwards well, we thought that was not edifying and we would encourage you to do this. Sometimes we encourage them to keep quiet. Sometimes encourage them to keep quiet for a while, then try to help them. We don't do what we should do, but this is the way it should be done. I would love to see it done. There is no reason too, why we should look to a seminary student, it's entirely possible that some of you businessmen not many, because God does not give everybody an utterance spiritual gift, but it may well be possible that some of you do have a gift of utterance. And the whole church should have an opportunity to hear you minister your gift, for you're part of the body just as I'm part of the body or anyone else, and we each will be blessed as every member exercises his gift and as the priests exercise their priesthood too.

Fourthly, the New Testament church principles protect the church against heresy. Now I'm going to say something that might shock you, but it's true, to my experience. I have never yet, I have never, I've never seen a church which practices New Testament church principles turn from the word of God, I've never yet. Now I'm sure there are some, the Apostle Paul said in Acts chapter 20, "From your own selves there shall rise up men who shall speak heretically." And there have been wolves among the flock, there were wolves among the flock in the early days. But the principle of free exercise of spiritual gifts protects the church against heresy. Do you remember what Paul did in the meeting in Antioch? Let's turn over there, Galatians chapter 2 verses 11 through 14. The apostle is writing to the Galatians and he illustrates with an incident that occurred in Antioch. You remember the problem is the problem of law, circumcision and its relationship to the good news. And Paul is arguing his case and he says,

“But when Peter was come to Antioch, I withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed. For before that certain came from James, he did eat with the Gentiles: but when they were come, (That is men who came from Jerusalem which was more legalistic and had not yet come to clarity of thinking on the relationship of Gentiles to the New Testament teaching Peter you see was eating with the Gentiles, enjoying fellowship with them, but when the brethren from Jerusalem, from ecclesiastical headquarters, apparently in Peter’s mind at least) when they were come, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing them which were of the circumcision. (I wonder what he feared. Was it possible that he thought, I’m not going to be invited to the apostles’ Bible conference next year in Jerusalem? What was it that he feared? I’ve heard some people say the Apostle Peter was fearful and afraid and denied the Lord before Pentecost, but when the Holy Spirit came he was a bold apostle for Jesus Christ. That was true, occasionally, not always. You see there is never, there is never a time in our life when we reach a plane of life upon which it is not possible for us to fall, even if we are apostles. Now let’s read on) and the other Jews dissembled likewise with him; (He had his followers, you see even apostles can be hypocritical, what do you expect of us ordinary people?) And dissembled in like manner with him insomuch that Barnabas also was carried away by their false pretense (And it’s possible even for a man, a close associate of the apostle to be deceived, carried away. And you can see leading figure in the church of Christ swept away by the hypocrisy of others. Be careful whom you follow. Be careful.) But when I saw that they walked not uprightly according to the truth of the gospel, I said unto Peter before them all”

Right in the meeting of the church, right there, he stood up in the assembly of the saints in Antioch remember where there were five teachers and prophets, their recorded in Acts chapter 13, multiple gift, multiple ministry, gifted ministry. And in the midst he stood up and rebuked the Apostle Peter before them all. He could not have done that in the ordinary meeting. As a matter of fact, he might never have had a chance to say

anything to the whole congregation. Oh, maybe once a year you have the congregational meeting, but the chips are pretty well stacked then. But in the meeting once a week, there is freedom to protect the church from heresy. That’s why Paul tells Titus to appoint elders and remind them that they are to rebuke sharply, rebuke sharply those that are unsound in the faith. And so in the meeting on Sunday night, when someone gets up and utters heresy it’s the need, or it’s necessary for the elders to immediately get up and say, “Now wait a minute!” You can say it kindly, “I think perhaps brother you’ve said too much on that point,” or “it seems to me that this is not quite in accordance with Scripture.” Several times in our meeting we have not carried these things out as well perhaps as we should have. But several times in our meeting, I remember once when Mr. Prier stood up and had to correct something that had been said because it was said contrary to the word of God very plainly.

Now we’re not talking about incidental interpretations of texts, it would be possible for you to get up in the meeting and differ with me over Hebrews chapter 6, that isn’t the kind of thing we’re talking about. We’re talking about heresy, teaching that vitally affects the health of the local church in a serious way. So it protects the church against heresy. There is no ultimate protection against the utterance of heresy in a church; there is protection against the continued utterance of it. There will always be error spoken in a church. The health of the church does not depend upon the prevention of error ever being said, it cannot be prevented. The health of the church depends upon doing something about it as we said last week when we were talking about discipline. So let’s remember that. I’ve seen this sad situation happen now over the last fifty years. In the United States, in the southern part of the United States, the great denominations were generally speaking sound in the faith, but now, there has been a great departure from the faith. I won’t say how much, you have your opinion, I have mine. But I fully believe that one of the contributing factors has been that they have a framework in which if one man goes astray the whole congregation goes astray. And finally, even more, if one man in

the seminary goes astray, the whole stream is polluted at its source. You do not believe this perhaps, but I've been in seminary work for twenty-five years, there are many many protestant theological seminaries in this country from which you can graduate with a bachelor of divinity degree without a single course in the Bible text itself. Just look at the catalogs.

Fifthly, the New Testament church principles encourage expansion. Just a word about this, the church has as its master word, the word go. In other words, diffusion is the word of the church, not concentration. That's why I hope in Believers chapel we will never have the concept of now that were over on Churchill way, this is where we're going to carry on our ministry. That's just the place from which we spread out all over the world, the testimony to Jesus Christ, expansion. Now if you're going to expand, everyone knows that you must not have much baggage, and consequently, the less baggage, the easier it is to go. A mobile force dispenses with impedimenta, and we do not need the clanking chains of cumbrous ecclesiasticism in the local church. It hinders us, it does not help us.

Sixthly, The New Testament principles are beautifully adaptable to persecution. Adaptable to persecution, perhaps this doesn't mean so much to you now, but the age of the church of Jesus Christ is drawing to an end. The mystery of iniquity was already working in Paul's day, how much more is it working now? The final manifestation will be the unveiling of the man of sin, in the mean time the mystery of lawlessness is at work. If you're a Christian and you are not aware of the fact that there is this secret of lawlessness at work in the hearts of professing Christians, then you're woefully misguided in your understanding of what is happening today. In our Christian leadership, and I'm using that in the broadest term, in the broadest sense. In our Christian leadership, there is apostasy of the rankest sort. Many of our leaders who are writing books about spiritual things if not communists are so much like them that you can not tell the difference.

For example, last year, I think it was last year, perhaps the year before Joseph Fletcher wrote a book called *Situation Ethics*, again he has written *Moral Responsibility*. Now these books had a very wide circulation among Christians, and believe it or not a very wide circulation in evangelical circles too. Some of whom fell for some of the things in Fletcher's book, some of whom did not. I had my students in my class in Romans read *Situation Ethics* last year and compare them with Paul's ethics. That's the only thing you have to do to see the error of it, but very few people do that. Fletcher was a working communist, now I don't know that he was a communist, he was a working communist that is he worked constantly with them in their tasks. Now he's a professor in one of our theological seminaries, our protestant theological seminary. Now this is the kind of thing that exists in Christendom. Now therefore, in these groups you will always find that there is a strong attack upon fundamentalism, always find that, it goes hand in hand with it. Fundamentalism is opposed to the word of God; fundamentalism is opposed to the principles of the church of Jesus Christ, et cetera. They've been fighting and fighting and fighting, you can go all the way back to Harry Emerson Fosdick, he's kind of the grand daddy of present day liberalism, and read his words about the inerrancy of the Scriptures, how ridiculous it was to believe that the Bible was the word of God. He said, "I do not believe in the virgin birth, I do not know of any intelligent Christian minister who does." I'm glad I didn't know him when he said that remark, hurt my feelings.

Now do you not think that if this gains the ascendancy in the United States, do you think it's going to be easy for Christians to meet? Fundamentalists, those who believe the Bible, or you may not like the term fundamentalism, so I'll just say evangelicals. Do you think it's going to be easy for you to meet? It's not. And you know it's very easy to train your guns on a big edifice. But the New Testament church principles which stress the individual and his responsibility in the church and the goal, without the stress on the stationary sides of the Christian faith. The New Testament church principles are beautifully adaptable to persecution, times of persecution. It's going to be very difficult to

escape persecution; it will be easier if we are following the New Testament. And I think a lot of the things that our monies have gone into shall be shattered, stolen, wrecked, by the enemies of the gospel of Christ. And perhaps if we had spent ourselves in the propagation of the truth, when that time comes we'll be better off. Well at least adaptable. By the way did you notice in the New Testament, I think there are only about three references to singing, nothing wrong with singing, I'm not fighting singing this morning among all the things I'm fighting, not singing. But there are only three references to it; do you know why I think? Perhaps because the early church didn't have time to stop and have a singspiration every night, and advertise the fact that they were meeting in this place, for it wouldn't be long before the Jews and the Romans and the rest would be there, and the saints would be disturbed.

And finally, you must have seven points remember; the New Testament church principles are adjustable to all societies. I do not believe that they are not adjustable to all societies and cultures. As a matter of fact, the one church in the New Testament to which Paul directed the most of his spiritual teaching regarding the local church, that church is the church at Corinth. And surprisingly, not surprisingly really in the light of what I said, surprisingly, this book has been attacked by evangelicals; they have gone to it and said, “Now the things that Paul wrote to Corinth well they're not to be followed by all the church, they just apply to the Corinthians. I always smile at that, do you know why? It's almost as if Paul were living in nineteen hundred and sixty-eight and he heard some of the brethren say that because he has several remarks in his book that seem to be specifically directed to that objection, what he wrote very special, not for all the churches. Let me read them to you. 1 Corinthians chapter 1 verse 1 and 2,

“Paul called to be an apostle of Jesus Christ through the will of God, and Sosthenes our brother, Unto the church of God which is at Corinth, to them that are sanctified in Christ

Jesus, called to be saints, with all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours:”

In other words, the things that I’m teaching are universally taught among the churches, not special, universal. 1 Corinthians chapter 7 verse 17, here in the chapter in which he has some words to say on the subject of marriage and other matters he says in verse 17, “But as God hath distributed to every man, as the Lord hath called every one, so let him walk. And so ordain I in all churches.” 1 Corinthians chapter 11 and verse 16 in which the apostle has something to say about women’s hats. You’ve never heard me say anything about that, that’s six years Believers Chapel has been in existence, I’ve never said one word about it, because I don’t think it’s anywhere near the most important thing in the New Testament. This is the only passage in which anything is said on it. I have some definite views about it, but I think it should be put in its place, in its proper place. The thing I’m interested in is the 16th verse, because someone might say, Ah, that’s just for Corinth, “But if any man seem to be contentious, we have no such custom, neither the churches of God.” No such custom of disobeying what I am telling the Corinthians. Chapter 14, you didn’t know there was so much about this did you? Ah you see, Paul knew that these things that he wrote to Corinth which had to do with the local church, they would be objected to and say ah, that’s just for them not for us. So he says verse 33, well let’s, let’s read there, “For God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all churches of the saints.” Verse 36, ladies, I skipped that intervening verse; I won’t say anything about it this morning. Verse 36, “What? Came the word of God out from you? or came it unto you only?” In other words, is the word of God to the Corinthians only? No, everything that we have said is said among all the churches.

And the beautiful thing about the New Testament pattern is that it is adaptable to all societies in all cultures. Whether Western or whether Eastern and Oriental, the New Testament principles are universally adaptable. Other principles are not. When we try to

take our form of church government that is generally practiced out to the mission field, it hopelessly fails. Are we going to construct denominations on the mission field with presbytery, synod, general assembly, denominational headquarters, et cetera, over and over again, those are built on Western patterns. As a matter of fact, New Testament Church order can be traced back largely to the principles that dominated the Roman Empire. And we carried them over into the local church. Let's go back to the New Testament, it's workable, wonderfully workable, it glorifies God, discourages human glory, enables us to exercise priesthood, ministry, protects the church from heresy, enables the church to expand and also fits us for the times of persecution.

Well now you've heard me speak, if you have any questions, our time is up really this morning. Feel free to come to me, and if you have any objections, come. Because when we started Believers Chapel as I've said once before, the elders agreed that one of the great principles that would govern them would be the principle of flexibility. That is, we fully anticipated that six years from then we might see something differently than the way we saw it then. And if in our study of the word of God we had grown and we have seen that we have some misplaced emphasis here or have been wrong in this point, we hope we have the grace to change. We always want to follow the word of God, that's why we do not have any creed in Believers Chapel, this is our creed. We're not against creeds, per se, a creed is a necessary thing, this is it. Now our understanding of this as it grows, our church should function more properly, more honoring to the Lord. So feel free to talk to any of the elders or come to us with problems that you have, we want it that way. Let's close in a word of prayer.

[Prayer] Father we thank Thee for the wonderful revelation of the simplicity of the local church ...

[AUDIO ENDS ABRUPTLY]

“Advantages of New Testament Church Order” by S. Lewis Johnson
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