

Ephesians 3:7-10: Of this gospel I was made a minister according to the gift of God's grace, which was given me by the working of his power. ⁸ To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, ⁹ and to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things, ¹⁰ so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places.

Intro: What does Jesus Christ love the most on earth? The Church! His Bride!

Earl Blackburn: Do you love the Lord Jesus Christ? Are you a member of a church? If you are not, how can you say you truly love the Savior when you are not a part of that which He loves the most on earth?

Hymn (Timothy Dwight): I love Your church, O Lord! Her saints before You stand; Dear as the apple of Your eye; and graven on Your hand.

- Beyond my highest joy; I prize her heavenly ways; her sweet communion, solemn vows; her hymns of love & praise.

- I love Your church, O God; the people You have called; the church our blest Redeemer saved; with His own precious blood.

One Minister: God created the world to get a bride for His Son! [Jesus is the Husband & the church His bride!]

- **Mark 2:19:** Can the wedding guests fast while the bridegroom is with them?

- **2 Corinthians 11:2:** I betrothed you to one husband, to present you as a pure virgin to Christ.

- **Ephesians 5:31-32:** "Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." ³² This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church.

- **Matthew 16:18:** I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

1. The Church: The Right Preaching Of God's Word And The Right Practice Of The Ordinances Of Christ

a. The Church: The called out ones – assembly of believers in Christ – His followers; Embassies of heaven!

b. The right preaching of God's Word: The Word of God is central! **Ephesians 3:7-9:** Of **this gospel** I was made a minister according to the gift of God's grace, which was given me by the working of his power. ⁸ To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles **the unsearchable riches of Christ**, ⁹ and to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things: **GOSPEL:** God, Man, Christ, Response

c. The right practice of the ordinances of Christ: Baptism and the Lord's Supper: 1) Baptism:

Matthew 28:19-20: Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.

- **Baptism marks who should be included:** Believers: membership class, interview with leaders, congregation votes

Matthew 18:18: Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. The Church doesn't make people Christians but discerns who is!

2) Lord's Supper: 1 Corinthians 11:23-26: For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, ²⁴ and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, "This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." ²⁵ In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." ²⁶ For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

- **Regular participation in the Lord's Supper marks who is continuing to follow Jesus and living a life of repentance, faith, and obedience**

We must discipline those who refuse to keep following Jesus and live a life of repentance, faith, & obedience to Christ: Matt. 18:15-17: If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you & him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. ¹⁶ But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. ¹⁷ If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.

1 Cor. 5:11: But now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of sexual immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or swindler - not even to eat with such a one.

The Church: Baptized Believers who believe in the true Gospel of Jesus Christ who continue to turn from sin and follow Jesus – they seek to obey all that Jesus has commanded, glorify God, and make disciples.

Of A Gospel Church: We believe that a visible Church of Christ is a congregation of baptized believers associated by covenant in the faith & fellowship of the gospel; observing the ordinances of Christ; governed by His laws, & exercising the gifts, rights, & privileges invested in them by His Word; that its only scriptural officers are Bishops, or Pastors, & Deacons, whose qualifications, claims, & duties are defined in the Epistles to Timothy & Titus.

2. The Church Is Congregational: The Church Is Ruled By The Gathered Church Under Christ

a. Jesus Christ is the Head and Leader of the Church: The Church belongs to Christ: **Colossians 1:15-19:** He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. ¹⁶ For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities - all things were created through him and for him. ¹⁷ And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. ¹⁸ And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. ¹⁹ For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell

b. Who does Jesus give authority under Him to rule in the church? What does the Bible say about who should have final say about who is affirmed as a Christian and who should be removed from membership because of unrepentant sin and who should be affirmed as faithful Gospel preachers or other officers in the church? The elders? A bishop? Or the congregation – the church? Yes! The church! The congregation!

- **Matt. 18:15-18:** If your brother sins against you, go & tell him his fault, between you & him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. If he refuses to listen to them, **tell it to the church**. & if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile & a tax collector. Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, & whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven

- **1 Corinthians 5:1-5:** It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality **among you**, and of a kind that is not tolerated even among pagans, for a man has his father's wife. ² And you are arrogant! Ought you not rather to mourn? Let him who has done this **be removed from among you**. ³ For though absent in body, I am present in spirit; and as if present, I have already pronounced judgment on the one who did such a thing. ⁴ **When you are assembled** in the name of the Lord Jesus and my spirit is present, with the power of our Lord Jesus, ⁵ you are to deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord.

- **2 Corinthians 2:6-7:** For such a one, **this punishment by the majority** is enough, ⁷ so you should rather turn to forgive and comfort him, or he may be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow.

- **Galatians 1:8-9:** But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed. ⁹ As we have said before, so now I say again: If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed.

- **Acts 6:1-6:** Now in these days when the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint by the Hellenists arose against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution. ² And the twelve

summoned the full number of the disciples and said, "It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables." ³ Therefore, **brothers, pick out from among you** seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty. ⁴ But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word." ⁵ And what they said **pleased the whole gathering**, and **they chose** Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolaus, a proselyte of Antioch. ⁶ These they set before the apostles, and they prayed and laid their hands on them.

The vast majority of New Testament books were written to congregations.

Mark Dever: No matter the church polity, the people always end up with the final say – through their dollars and their feet. (Presbyterian church-kept going through pastors; Another local Presbyterian church)

3. The Church Is Led By Qualified Elders

a. Elders are qualified: 1 Timothy 3:1-7: The saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task. ² Therefore an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, ³ not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. ⁴ He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, ⁵ for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God's church? ⁶ He must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil. ⁷ Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace, into a snare of the devil.

b. Elders should be plural: Acts 14:23: And when they had appointed **elders** for them in every **church**, with prayer and fasting they committed them to the Lord in whom they had believed.

c. Elders lead: Hebrews 13:17: Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you.

4. The Church Is Served By Qualified Deacons

a. Deacons are qualified: 1 Timothy 3:8-13: Deacons likewise must be dignified, not double-tongued, not addicted to much wine, not greedy for dishonest gain. ⁹ They must hold the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience. ¹⁰ And let them also be tested first; then let them serve as deacons if they prove themselves blameless. ¹¹ Their wives likewise must be dignified, not slanderers, but sober-minded, faithful in all things. ¹² Let deacons each be the husband of one wife, managing their children and their own households well. ¹³ For those who serve well as deacons gain a good standing for themselves and also great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus.

b. Deacons serve: Acts 6:1-4: Now in these days when the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint by the Hellenists arose against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution. ² And the twelve summoned the full number of the disciples and said, "It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables. ³ Therefore, brothers, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty. ⁴ But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word."

Matt Smethurst: 1) Deacons spot and meet tangible needs: In Acts 6, people needed food!

Our Church Constitution: (1) The office of deacon is described in 1 Timothy 3:8–13 and Acts 6:1–7. The church shall recognize, in accordance with the constitutional provisions on elections, men who are giving of themselves in service to the church, and who possess particular gifts of service. These members shall be received as gifts of Christ to His church and set apart as deacons.

(2) Deacons shall care for the temporal needs of members, attend to the accommodations for public worship, and encourage and support those able to help others and those with gifts of administration.

Rob: giving rides; **Dave:** Visiting a shut-in; **Deacons:** Serve the Lord's supper

2) Deacons protect and promote church unity: In Acts 6, the lack of food was causing division between the Hellenists and Hebrews: **Acts 6:1-4:** Now in these days when the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint by the Hellenists arose against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution.

- **Matthew 5:9:** Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.

- **Proverbs 19:11:** Good sense makes one slow to anger, and it is his glory to overlook an offense.

- **1 Corinthians 1:10-11:** I appeal to you, brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment. ¹¹ For it has been reported to me by Chloe's people that there is quarreling among you, my brothers.

- **1 Corinthians 13:1-8:** If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. ² And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. ³ If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing. ⁴ Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant ⁵ or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; ⁶ it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. ⁷ Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. ⁸ Love never ends.

Mark Dever: You don't want people serving as deacons who are unhappy with your church. The deacons should never be the ones who complain the loudest or jar the church with their actions or attitudes. Quite the opposite! The deacons should be mufflers or shock absorbers . . . You don't want to nominate deacons who don't recognize the importance of the ministry of preaching and teaching, but people who are anxious to protect it. More broadly, you want the most supportive people in the church to serve as the deacons. So when you're considering who might serve as a deacon, look for people with gifts of encouragement.

Bob and Paul – all of them: Positive, encouraging people, gentle and lowly like Jesus, not complainers

3) Deacons serve and support the ministry of the elders: Our elders have been doing benevolence work – now the deacons can do that. So much of the burdens about building and finance issues are lifted from the elders by the deacons so the elders can give themselves to the Word of God and prayer.

Bob: Teaching on Wednesday nights in past – coming up; **Deacons:** Leading with helping the Heaters move

4) Deacons are mercy ministers: Galatians 2:10: [When Paul received the right hand of fellowship from the other Apostles] Only, they asked us to remember the poor, the very thing I was eager to do.

Galatians 6:10: So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith.

(3) The deacons shall receive, hold, and disburse a fund for benevolence, reporting on its use to the elders at their request, and reporting to the church its total receipts and total disbursements only.

5) Deacons: a team of leading servants: Gal. 5:13-16: For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, **but through love serve one another.** For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." But if you bite & devour one another, watch out that you are not consumed by one another. But I say, walk by the Spirit, & you will not gratify the desires of the flesh

Paul: Keeping up of the grounds and building and finances

6) Deacons are role-specific ministry mobilizers: (4) The deacons, with the agreement of the elders, may establish unpaid administrative positions or committees of members to assist them in fulfilling their responsibilities in the church.

Dave: Ushering; **Rob:** Enlisting people to help the Heaters with their move

c. Jesus Christ is the greatest servant ever: Jesus is the Servant of all servants!

Mark 10:45: For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, & to give his life as a ransom for many.

Philippians 2:1-11: So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, ² complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. ³ Do nothing from rivalry or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. ⁴ Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. ⁵ Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, ⁶ who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, ⁷ but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. ⁸ And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. ⁹ Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, ¹⁰ so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹ and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Christ's Bride Makes God's Great Wisdom Known
She Is His Very Flesh And Bone
All Peoples Who Had Hearts Of Stone
Were Saved By Trusting Christ Alone
For Her He'd Suffer And Atone
He'd Bear God's Wrath And Cry And Groan
Then Die And Rise To Take The Throne
Come To Him Now And Don't Postpone
He's Come To Take You As His Own
It's Through The Church That God Is Shown
One Look To Him Our Minds Are Blown
For He's Our Everything Alone!

Christ Jesus Our Great Elder Brother
His Bride, The Church, Our Loving Mother
He's Overseer Like No Other
Blameless, Perfect, Humble Lover
With Grace And Peace His People Smother
Died And Rose Our Sins To Cover
Look To Him And You'll Discover
The Key To Serving One Another!

Christ Jesus Is Most Dignified
To All Of Life He Is Our Guide
Perfect, Pure, No Hint Of Pride
Not Double-Tongued – He Never Lied
No Greed Or Sin But Blameless Died
He Served A Bride That Crucified

Then Rose And Now We're Justified
By Faith Alone God's On Our Side
In Him Redemption Is Applied
Makes All Things New With Christ Allied
To Love And Serve With Him Inside
The Church Whose Eyes He Opened Wide
So Now We Serve And No Love Hide
No Sacrifice For You Denied
All Because Christ Lived And Died
And Everything To Us Provide!