

## **Christ' Design for His Church**

This passage of scripture here in 1<sup>st</sup> Timothy is straightforward, but in some ways it is like sitting down with your child and having that talk about the birds and bees. It needs to be done but can be a little uncomfortable. As the pastor of Canyon Bible talking about my own position of leadership it is needed, even if it challenges me. So, my aim this morning is to put pastor, elder, overseer, bishop, (all names for church leadership that can be used interchangeably) in perspective with the life of Christ's church as it is lived out. Using God inspired Scripture that gives an understanding of the qualifications of the office of Elder and how He has chosen to structure leadership in His church.

What I am going to attempt this morning is to put Christ's relationship with His church and the church's relationship with leadership in perspective. I want clarify what the proper relationship between leadership and the congregation looks like. I will take five positions: headship, priesthood, authority, leadership and eldership. I will use scripture to define and to support my positions on each to develop an overview of Christ, His church and His leadership and how they relate to each other to define Christ honoring church life. This morning we will cover the first four and next Lord's day we will focus in on leadership and eldership.

### **1) Headship of the Church**

First, I want to make clear the church does not belong to the elders or even the congregation. It is Christ's church and He alone is the Head of the Church. In Paul's letter to the church in Ephesus he wrote, "...[Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior.](#)" (Ephesians 5:23) It is His church and He is the one

who gives it life. The life of the church is dependent upon Christ who “is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. <sup>19</sup> For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, <sup>20</sup> and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.” (Colossians 1:18-20) Christ’s work in life, death on the cross and rising from the dead, and the work of His Holy Spirit is what grows us spiritually through the process we call sanctification. Sanctification is best accomplished in the life of the church as community. Which is why Paul wrote, “... we, *His church*, are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, <sup>16</sup> from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.” (Ephesians 4:15-16) As the body of Christ we grow spiritually better together and as we grow in our love for Christ we grow in our love for each other. Observing a loving church body stimulates a longing for people to know more about Christ. This is an important part of God’s plan for the lost world to see their need for Christ. It is recorded in Romans, “For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. <sup>20</sup> For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse.” (Romans 1:19-20) Just as God can be seen in the creation of the world and all that is in the universe, so too, Christ is seen in His church. It is Christ’s church that demonstrates to the world the divine nature of Christ and how He makes people into new creations.

All of these inspired scripture passages gives us the understanding that Canyon Bible Church is a body created by Christ that gets its leadership and its spiritual nourishment from its head, Jesus Christ. The church is not just a human organization. It is a spiritual organism, a living body, not a human or physical body, but a spiritual

body whose nourishment comes from its Head, who is divine. Thus the universal Church and in specific our church is called to live a supernatural life by the power of Christ, the Scriptures and the Holy Spirit that dwells in every true believer and is most powerfully seen in the life of Christ's church.

In the 17<sup>th</sup> century the corporate model of business spread throughout Europe and America for its effective management. European and American business leaders are always looking for more efficient ways of doing business. So, naturally they thought the corporate model would be good for the Church, help it function better and operate more efficiently. However, this is not God's model for the Church, which is a Theocracy. This man-made change in God's church structure began the path of choosing pragmatic positions and solutions for the church, even if they violated Scripture. When we insert human structure into the church, it suffers spiritually. I would argue that this is one of the prime causes of the spiritually weak environment of the church in America today. Good men trying to take God's design for His church and make it better, more efficient and politically correct. This is why at Canyon Bible Church we work hard to hold fast to God's inspired Scripture, the very Word of God and work to build a church body whose Head is truly Christ and operates as God put forth in the Scriptures.

## **2) Priesthood**

Over the last century in our world and especially in our American church culture we have moved away from who God says are priests and ministers to a position that endorses ministry for the professionals: elders, pastors and bishops as the only true priests and ministers of the Gospel of Jesus. However, scriptures teaches something quite different, saying, "... *you, meaning every believer, you and you and you, are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his*

marvelous light. <sup>10</sup> Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy." (1 Peter 2:9-10) All members of Christ's body, which is His church, populated by believers in Christ as the only Son of God, fully God, all are priests and ministers. We see then that it is not God's plan or design for His Church to **only, only** have priests and ministers who are the professionals or even be led solely by those who He has called to lead as elders. Jesus' design for His Church goes beyond how an individual church community is to function and live out the scriptures; the scriptures call for Christ's true global Church to represent His kingdom on earth. John wrote in Revelation, "Jesus Christ the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of kings on earth. To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood <sup>6</sup> and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen." (Revelation 1:5-6) All of Christ's true and faithful church communities make up His kingdom, look at verse 6, we are to be part of a kingdom of priests to God! Then the verse ends with "Amen." We say, "Amen" at the end of prayers and when we hear something we believe is from God, why? In Hebrew "amen" means: "let it be" or "so be it" or "it is true". You are not priests of God because you desire to be, but because God ordains it. Let me ask, "How are you doing as God's priests? Are you living up to His calling in your life to be His priests and ministers to this fallen world? Are you fulfilling your God ordained role as priest of the Gospel of Christ?" If not, you cannot change the past, but you change today and tomorrow – so, quit being disobedient and start living faithfully to your Lord and Savior.

The New Testament's main theme is Christ and His gospel and as you study the scriptures they do not elevate elders or the priesthood above believers. We all are subject to and are called to be obedient and serve as Christ's priests. Although we may have different positions within the church and function with different levels of

authority, nowhere in the Bible does it show people need to go through clergy or a person in the appointed office of priest or elder to speak to or confess their sins to God. Paul makes this clear in his writing to Timothy, which we studied a few weeks ago, “For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, <sup>6</sup> **who gave himself as a ransom for all, which is the testimony given at the proper time.**” (1 Timothy 2:5-6) We, each believer, go directly to God, through the relationship restored by Christ, not through a professional priest or minister. Very simply put, every believer is a priest of God through the authority of Jesus Christ and has direct access to God.

Every Christian is to be a minister of the gospel. The word “minister” does NOT define my pastoral office in Christ’s church or more specifically Canyon Bible Church. The word “minister” defines every believer’s function. As pastor, my function is as seen in Ephesians, Christ “gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, <sup>12</sup> **to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ,** <sup>13</sup> **until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God.”** (Ephesians 4:11-13) So you, all of you, are ministers, my job is to spiritually equip you, to equip you for ministry, as it is written, “As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God’s varied grace: <sup>11</sup> **whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies—in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.**” (1 Peter 4:10-11) My beloved, Christ has called each of us to be His priests, to live out the gospel and share His gospel of salvation with the lost. God chose you before creation to be called His children. However, Jesus also warned that believers should not become prideful, He said, “**You are not to be called rabbi, for you have one teacher, and you are all brothers. <sup>9</sup> And call no man your father on earth, for you have one Father, who is in heaven. <sup>10</sup> Neither be called**

instructors, for you have one instructor, the Christ. <sup>11</sup> The greatest among you shall be your servant.” (Matthew 23:8-11) Only Christ is the One true Rabbi and Teacher. We are all brothers and sisters, called to be priests, sharing the gospel of Christ, discipling new believers, evangelizing the lost and serving others with a grateful heart for what Christ has done in us. When we submit to Christ and His authority in our lives He removes our heart of stone and gives us a heart of flesh.

### **3) Authority**

Under Christ, the head of our church, the congregation has final authority in matters of the church. The congregation in exercising this authority is holding to the standards of Scripture. The church is lead by the Holy Spirit just as the Holy Spirit leads every believer who submits to His authority. The congregation submits to Christ by submitting ourselves to His Spirit and living in community under the authority of those God has called to lead His church with a heart of service for each other.

What I am trying to explain is that the church comes under Christ. Christ gives leaders to guide His church and the congregation submits itself to God’s leadership, but it is the church body that comes together to settle matters of faith and church life guided by the scriptures. First, I believe this is implied by the very fact that all believers are of God’s chosen priesthood. Then it is dealt with specifically in Matthew, these are the words of Christ our Lord, “If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. <sup>16</sup> 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.” *The elders work to deal with conflict and sinful behavior with the goal of restoration and reconciliation, but from here it goes to the church.* <sup>17</sup> “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. <sup>18</sup> 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.” (Matthew 18:15-18) If the church blinds someone to the church body by faith in Christ and they are to be bound with deep affection as part of the church body and if the church looses or casts out a person from the church they are cast out before Christ. This is sacred authority that Christ entrusts to His church. As it is written in the Book of Ecclesiastes chapter 3, “For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven ... <sup>6</sup> a time to seek, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to cast away.” (Ecclesiastes 3:1 & 6) This is the authority of the body of Christ, His church. The final authority is Christ’s and the Holy Scriptures and after Christ it is the elders and then finally the church. The church is the last earthly court of appeal for church discipline. It is the church that manages itself by God’s standards. It is the church that has the responsibility to know if the pastor is preaching sound doctrine. It is the church body as a living and breathing body of Christ that has authority over church life.

However, this does not mean local churches should not form associations and fellowships for mutual encouragement and guidance and ministry. It only means that the local congregation decides its own matters under the authority of God’s Word and Spirit of Christ guided by its leaders. This is why your CBC leadership is exploring our options with both - Community Church and Christian Missionary Alliance. But, know that if this exploratory effort goes much further the entire church body will become involved for it is the church body that has the authority to make this level of decision.

So, at this point, we have seen Christ is the Head of the church, all members of His church are part of the body of Christ and therefore priests and ministers. The collective body of Christ known as Canyon Bible Church has final authority in our

church operating under the authority of Christ and His Word and His Spirit and God's appointed leaders.

#### **4) Leadership**

God calls some members of each congregation to direct the focus of ministry, spiritually feed the flock, preach the Word of God and make application of God's Word for the living of our lives. These leaders help guide members to understand God's calling in their lives, live by the Bible's standards and to live as servants.

In other words, even though there is equality before God as His children and heirs and priests and ministers, some, but not all, are called by God to serve as leaders. Here in 1<sup>st</sup> Timothy, as well as a number of other places in the scriptures, God gave Paul the qualifications for leadership. I am a redeemed sinner like everyone else. I work on my relationship with the Lord, but it is you, the body of Christ that must determine if I meet these standards in 1<sup>st</sup> Timothy? This is something both the church and I should take seriously. We will spend time on these qualifications next week.

I believe these qualifications are straightforward and clear, even though many in today's "Christian Church" culture would argue for exceptions and changes. You see, some feel God did not know how things would change and we need to help Him modernize the Bible. Think of the millions of changes that have taken place throughout history: countries have come and gone, wars have been won and lost, inventions have given us cars, planes and trains, medicine, science and on and on. But the Word of God, the Bible never changes! It is the rock on which we stand. Can I get an Amen?! The god today that many believe in is not the God of the Bible – the Creator of everything. When a leader plays loose with the scriptures to be politically correct to please people, the church becomes man-centered and Christ is no longer its Head. They are attempting to attract people to their church, not Christ's



church and this brings verse 7 into play, “Moreover, he (*meaning the pastor or elder*) must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace, into a snare of the devil.” Many outsiders do not like Christianity or Christians and many are made nervous by pastors, but they will respect a pastor or Christian who holds true to the Word of God for it is clear where they stand and what they believe.

When Joyce and I were working in El Salvador with the most violent gangs in the world, they were easy to understand and their rules were clear. If a person broke one of their rules, they acted quickly – they were killed. It did not matter; the penalty was the same man, woman or child. They had no respect for the government because it was corrupt and self-serving. They had no respect for the Catholic Church for it mirrored the government. However, they respected true Christians who held fast to the Bible. They saw the love they had for Christ and for serving people. They saw the good that true Christians did, even for those who broke all the rules, like those in the gangs. Christians were respected because they desired people to know and live Christ. There are only two ways out of the gangs: death and if you became a Christian. To make sure a person is sincere about their new faith in Christ, they let them go, but they watch them and if they do what Christians should not do, they then serve out the penalty of death. They respect true believers even though they do not believe.

Back to church leadership, God says observe your leaders and observe are they submitted to Christ and the Word of God? In Hebrews it is written, “Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith. What is the standard of a pastor’s faith? Simple, we continue in verse 8, “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever. <sup>9</sup>Do not be led away by diverse and strange teachings.” (Hebrews 13:7-9a) Imitate men of God who hold fast to the Word of God, the Bible, for they show the path to true

peace, joy and salvation. Do **not** imitate pastors who teach diverse and strange teachings, pastors who play loose with the Word of God. They may be politically correct, but they are eternally wrong. Jesus said concerning the life path of salvation, “Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. <sup>14</sup> For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few.” (Matthew 7:13-14) The narrow gate is the path that pastors are to lead their congregations on. Christ calls us to be the remnant not to be popular with the world. Choosing a life lived for Christ is a serious decision of the truly brave for they choose not to belong to the world.

Then the scriptures are clear concerning the responsibility of the congregation. “Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith.” (Hebrews 13:7) Paul and his leadership team instructed the church, “We ask you, brothers, to respect those who labor among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, <sup>13</sup> and to esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Be at peace among yourselves.” (1 Thessalonians 5:12-13) For those who work to safeguard the spiritual life of the church and shepherd the flock, the congregation is to esteem them highly because of their love for God and His Word. The congregation is to live in peace and conflict is to be approached and settled with love for each other. Paul wrote to the elders of the church in Ephesus instructing them to, “Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood.” (Acts 20:28) The position of elder is one of servant-hood to Christ and the His church.

So the congregation, under Christ and by His Word and Spirit, uses its authority to recognize and affirm leaders whom God calls. And then the congregation puts those men in position of leadership and voluntarily supports that leadership by learning

from their teaching and following their initiatives. The congregation also holds the leadership to the standards found in the Bible.

This may sound to some like a contradiction — to have an authoritative congregation submitting to leaders that the congregation puts in place. But it is not a contradiction. Because there is a great difference between leadership that inspires and models and mobilizes and teaches and persuades and points the way in ministry and mission, and that of corporate authority of the congregation that puts doctrinal and moral boundaries around that leadership. The congregation holds leadership accountable to serve the good of the church. Congregational authority and strong leadership under that authority are compatible because they submit to the authority of Christ. This structure of authority is biblical and vital to the spiritual health of the church.

It is hard for me to believe I have run out of time this morning. So, next Lord's Day we will finish with examining those called to the "Leadership as Elders" and what it means for them to "Feed the Flock" Christ has entrusted to them.

In closing for our time this morning I hope you have come to see the importance of a church, which is a spiritually living organism and how the church must hold fast to the Scripture. To understand that Christ is the Head of every true church and leadership serves under His authority and it is the church's responsibility to hold leaders accountable to the doctrine found in the scriptures and its moral standards. It is this Christ designed balance that makes the church a place of peace, joy and safety. It is this environment that nurtures people's growing sanctification and supports them as they travel this perilous world toward eternity with God. May the Lord bless our efforts; Canyon Bible's efforts to live as He has designed for this will bring Him the honor and glory that He alone deserves and demonstrate to the world their desperate need for a Savior. May God bless us so that we, brothers and sisters of Canyon Bible Church, may bless many in Christ's name! Amen.