

OpenTheo

The Very Beginning



Church History - Steve Gregg

In "The Very Beginning," Steve Gregg explores the early days of the Christian church and its relationship to the Jewish synagogue. He notes that while the institutional church did not exist during this time, there was a faithful remnant of Jews who followed God. Discipleship was not about attending meetings or giving money, but about embracing the lordship of Jesus and following him wherever he went. Gregg emphasizes the importance of submission to apostolic authority and the Holy Spirit in understanding the true nature of the church.

Transcript

This is our second lecture on the subject of church history. And last time, I did little more than just give an introduction to the whole realm of church history, why I consider it to be important to study church history. Also, I went into some detail last time talking about the difference between what might be called the church, and an alternative thing that might be called the church.

The word church is used both of the institutional church and also of that spiritual movement made up of truly regenerated people that Jesus began. And I pointed out some of the differences because we will, throughout the study of the history of the church, have occasion to look at what the institutional church was doing. But there will be sometimes contrast or at least additional information to consider about what was going on in the real church.

Sometimes the real church was not in the institutional church. And for the simple reason that there were long periods of time when the institutional church was not in the real church. And so we need to be aware of the difference between what is usually looked at in studies of church history as the church.

Of course, during the Dark Ages, for example, the Roman Catholic institution is usually just called the church throughout almost all church histories. I'm of the opinion that that was not rightly called the church. I think that during the same period of time there were true Christians.

And when we get to the appropriate period of time, we will find out who they might have been and what they were doing and what they believed and how they differed from and how they were persecuted by those who were in the institutional church. However, we're at a much earlier stage than that in tonight's talk. Tonight I want to talk about the very beginnings of the church.

We go back to Jesus and the apostles. And I'd like to bring us up before the end of this lecture to the point in time where the apostles have come to the end of their race and they're passing it along to another generation. And then, of course, we'll have to wait till a later lecture to see who those later generations were, generally called the apostolic fathers and so forth, and the periods of persecution under the Caesars.

We will try to span from the very beginning of the church till the end of the apostolic age in this present talk. And I've given you a handout for that purpose because, as you can see, there's quite a few points I want to consider. And I'm going to have to consider them much more briefly, since there are so many, than I would normally consider individual points in a Bible study.

First of all, we need to be acquainted with the concept of the remnant of Israel before we can understand what Jesus did when he was here in calling people to himself. We need to understand that long before Jesus appeared on earth, God had a church. Most people point to Pentecost as the birth of the church.

And in one sense, that is a birth of the Christian church, as we know it now. That was definitely a new beginning for the church. But the Bible uses the word church also of Israel in the Old Testament.

Actually, it might be surprising to you, in the New Testament we find a place where Israel in the Old Testament is referred to in retrospect as the church. In Acts chapter 7, in the sermon that Stephen gave just prior to his becoming the first martyr of the Christian church, he's reciting and retelling a certain strand of Israel's history before his judges. And in speaking of Moses, he says this in Acts chapter 7, and in verse 38, he says, This is he who was in the congregation in the wilderness with the angel who spoke to him on Mount Sinai, and with our fathers, the one who received the living oracles to give to us.

Of course, it's referring to Moses. It says, He was the one who was with the congregation in the wilderness. Now, the congregation in the wilderness was clearly the Jews who came out of Egypt and were following with Moses.

But the word congregation there in the Greek New Testament, the word that Luke used, and I'm not sure if Stephen spoke his sermon in Greek or whether he gave it in Aramaic, and Luke has now translated it into Greek, but the Greek word in the Greek New Testament is ekklesia, which is the ordinary word for church. If we would translate consistently, we could have Stephen say, This is he, Moses, who was with the church in

the wilderness. Now, he wasn't, of course, thinking of the church as a building with stained glass windows and a steeple and a baptistry and padded pews and so forth.

There was no such church as that in the wilderness. So there was a building, the tabernacle, but it didn't have any seats in it because the only seat in it was the mercy seat. Only God rested there.

But the fact of the matter is, the word church, as used by Stephen here, means the ones who were called out. Ekklesia comes from two Greek particles. Ekk is out of, and kaleo is the Greek word for call.

And ekk, kaleo, or the ekklesia, are the called out ones. And in the Old Testament, you know, the Old Testament is written in Hebrew, but it was translated into Greek about 285 years before Christ, and that Greek translation of the Old Testament is called the Septuagint. And the Septuagint used the word ekklesia, which is the word always used in the New Testament to translate church.

The Old Testament Greek version, the Septuagint, used the word ekklesia for the congregation of Israel. Whenever Moses called together the congregation, the Greek Old Testament says the ekklesia, the church. Now, the Jews, of course, were called out ones in a literal sense.

They had been called out of Egypt to be a peculiar people. But according to the Scripture, their calledness out of Egypt is a type and a shadow of our own deliverance and our being called out of sin and out of darkness. That the exodus of the Jews from Egypt is a type, a foreshadowing of our own being called out of the bondage of sin.

The Passover lamb that was so instrumental in the exodus is the type of Christ, our Passover, who was slain for us according to Paul in 1 Corinthians 5, 7. So we have the called out ones in the Old Testament. And the whole nation of Israel were called out ones. And yet, not all of them even were God's people.

There was an institutional church even then. Anybody who had conformed to the religious system of Judaism and been circumcised, and especially if they had Jewish blood, but they didn't even have to have Jewish blood. They could be converted from paganism like Ruth or like Rahab, who were pagans who were converted to Judaism or many others.

They were part of the institution called Israel. They were part of that called out, ostensibly and nominally called out company. But within Israel, there was always a segment that were really the saved ones.

The ones that were really devoted to God. The ones that the prophets continually referred to as the remnant. You'll find this in all the prophets of the Old Testament.

They speak of the remnant of Israel. And there's a clear distinction made between the nation as a whole and the remnant in particular. F.F. Bruce, New Testament scholar, and also wrote some books on church history.

Although I don't think he made this point in any of his books on church history. He said that the remnant of Israel was that portion of the nation of Israel who were in fact what the whole nation was in theory. Or what the whole nation was called to be.

There were a few or some in Israel who were what Israel was called to be. In fact, and they were the remnant. In the book of Psalms, there is one place where there's a clear distinction made between the nation as a whole, the institutional church Israel, and the remnant within it.

If you would, for example, look at Psalm 50 and verse 5. Psalm 50 verse 5, God speaks and says, Gather my saints, saints means holy ones, together to me. Those who have made a covenant with me by sacrifice. OK, so there's some people in the nation that God is calling his saints, his holy ones, the ones who are in covenantal relationship with him through sacrifice.

But if you look further down in verse 16, the same Psalms says, But to the wicked, and these were the wicked in Israel, to the wicked, God says, what right have you to declare my statutes or to take my covenant in your mouth, seeing you hate instruction and cast my words behind you? Now, these people were not Gentiles he's addressing here in verse 16, because they were people who took his statutes and his covenant on their mouth. And others, like Isaiah said of some of the Jews, They draw near with their mouths, but their hearts are far from me. Jesus said the same applied to the many in the Jewish community of his own time as well.

But in the Psalms and in the prophets, we find repeated reference to the actual remnant. If you look at Malachi chapter 3, the last book of the Old Testament, we'll have just one of what could be many, many examples of this in the prophets. Malachi was writing at a time where the nation of Israel was, for the most part, fallen away in lukewarm.

God obviously had many, many complaints against the nation of Israel when Malachi wrote, because that's what the book is full of. However, in chapter 3 of Malachi, verses 16 and 17, in the midst of this decrying of the apostasy and lukewarmness of Israel, God says, or the prophet says, Then those who feared the Lord spoke to one another, and the Lord listened and heard them. So a book of remembrance was written before him for those who fear the Lord and who meditate on his name.

They shall be mine, says the Lord of hosts, on the day when I make them my jewels, and I will spare them as a man spares his own son who serves him. Now, in the midst of a general fallenness of the nation of the institutional Israel, there were those in Israel who were those that God describes as those who feared the Lord. These were the remnant.

They knew who each other were. In any religious institution, there are those who are religious in name only, and there are those who truly have a heart for the thing they're doing. And those who really are sincere quickly find the others who are sincere.

It's quite obvious who they are. And so also in Israel, there were a remnant there who feared the Lord, and they spoke often to each other, and their names are written in a book. The remnant were those who were written in the book.

It's interesting that Jesus at a later time, considerably later, 400 years later, said to his disciples, Don't rejoice in this, that the demons are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven. In other words, that they were part of the Jewish remnant of their generation. The remnant are those whose names are written in God's book of remembrance, and are his, and are his jewels.

But look at Malachi again in chapter 4 this time. In chapter 4, verse 2, there's a promise made by God. He says, To you who fear my name.

Well, that's the same people who were in chapter 3, verse 16, who met with each other and talked to each other, and who were written in his book, those who feared the Lord. Here they are again, this time a promise is made to them. Chapter 4, verse 2 of Malachi, But to you who fear my name, the son of righteousness shall arise, with healing in his wings.

And you shall go out and grow like fat, stall-fed calves. You shall trample the wicked, for they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet. On the day that I do this, says the Lord of hosts.

Well, it is said to the remnant, that the son of righteousness, whom all Christians must acknowledge is Jesus, the Messiah, would arise upon them, would enlighten them. It says in another place in Isaiah chapter 9, Those who sat in darkness have seen a great light. And upon those who sat in the shadow of death, a light has dawned.

And in the New Testament, I believe it's in the 4th chapter, if I'm not mistaken, of Matthew, that scripture in Isaiah is quoted as being fulfilled when Jesus preached to the Galileans, when his ministry began there. So we have the light of the Messiah arising and shining on those who feared the Lord, those who were the remnant of the Old Testament saints. You see, when Jesus came, he came to Israel.

And before Jesus began preaching, it was just like any other generation of Israel. There were hypocrites, as Jesus brought out plainly in his teaching, but there were also a remnant. There were those who feared the Lord.

Who were they? Well, old Elizabeth and Zacharias were among them, the parents of John the Baptist. Mary and Joseph were among those who feared the Lord. When Jesus was born, we learn of others, there was old Simeon in the temple, whom God had said would

not die until he'd seen the Lord's Christ.

And there was Anna, who was very old. And when she saw Jesus, she went out and spoke to those who were awaiting the redemption of Israel. This was the remnant.

And when Jesus came to adult life and began to preach, this remnant, when they heard him, came to him. And the Old Testament actually predicted that the remnant of Israel would come to the Messiah. Of course, when the Messiah would come to them.

Upon the coming of the Messiah to Israel, the remnant would come to him, to the Messiah. And of course, once the remnant of the Jews came to the Messiah, we call them Christians after that, or disciples. But if you look, for example, in Isaiah chapter 10, Isaiah chapter 10, verses 21 and 22, Isaiah said, the remnant, that's the remnant of Israel, the believing remnant in Israel, the remnant will return.

The remnant of Jacob, that's of Israel, to the mighty God. For though your people, O Israel, be as the sand of the sea, yet a remnant of them will return. The destruction decreed shall overflow with righteousness.

Now, this is an interesting thing. It says, though the children of Israel, of the national Israel, are numerous like the sand of the sea, only a remnant of them will return. Now, it's interesting that Paul quotes this verse in Romans 9, but he quotes it this way.

Though the children of Israel be as the sand of the seashore for molten, the remnant shall be saved. If you wish on your own time to turn to Romans chapter 9 and see that Paul quotes this Isaac verse, he rewords it a little bit, because Isaiah says, the remnant will return. Paul quotes it, the remnant will be saved.

Returning is equivalent to being saved. Why? Well, who are they returning to? Look at Isaiah 10, 21, the first verse we read there. The remnant will return to the mighty God.

Well, who is the mighty God in Isaiah? You only have to look one chapter earlier to answer that question. Isaiah 9, 6. Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given. The government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, the mighty God, the everlasting Father.

This expression, the mighty God, is found twice in Isaiah. In Isaiah 9, 6, where it's clearly said to be Jesus, the Messiah. And in Isaiah 10, 21, where it says that the remnant of Israel will come to him, will return to the mighty God, to the Messiah, to the child who is born.

And when they do, they will be saved. The remnant will return to the mighty God. And Paul quotes that the remnant shall be saved.

Paul's point is, of course, that although there are many, many Jewish people, only a

portion of them, only a remnant of them, are actually believers in Christ. Only a small percentage have actually been saved and come to the mighty God. But Paul says that's precisely how it was predicted that it would be.

Even Isaiah said that that was so. There might be thousands, millions even, of Jews, but only the remnant among them will be saved. The rest will not, according to Isaiah and according to Paul.

If you look over at John 6, there are some verses that have sometimes been used to prove a doctrine of an irresistible grace, suggesting that those who are predestined will irresistibly be drawn to Jesus. And it says in John 6, 37, Jesus said, All that the Father gives me will come to me, and the one who comes to me I will by no means cast out. That is, if the Father gives someone to Jesus, that person will come to Jesus.

It's a given. It's literally a given, no pun intended. They're given by God to Jesus.

And on this basis, some have thought, Well, you see, God has just simply unilaterally given certain people to Jesus, the elect, and they will irresistibly come to Jesus. Well, Jesus made that prediction in a very safe setting because we have to understand what his meaning was. If you look over at John 17, he tells us who the ones are that God gave him.

In John 17 and verse 6, Jesus is praying. He says, I have manifested your name to the men whom you have given me. That's the ones that Jesus said, All that the Father has given me will come to me.

Okay, who are these people? Well, the men that you have given me out of the world, they were yours. And you gave them to me, and they've kept your word. Who were these people that the Father gave to Jesus? They were the ones who were already God's people.

They were the ones who were already devoted to God. They were the remnant. All those who came to Christ among the Jews were the remnant.

They were already God's people. You have to realize it. There was a whole generation of people whose lives overlapped the period before and the period after Christ.

There were Jews who lived a good portion of their lives before Jesus ever became a public figure. And the latter part of their life, after Jesus had come and taught and called disciples. We have to assume that those of that generation who came to Jesus as disciples were those who before his public appearance were already God's people.

They were already part of the remnant. So that as the prophets predicted, the remnant of Israel would come to the Messiah. And upon doing so, would form a new body, which is, of course, what we usually refer to as the church today.

Now, in Old Testament there was the institutional church of Israel, the nation. People belonged to that simply by being born into it, being circumcised into it, adhering to the general doctrines of it. But there was also the remnant who were really God's people.

They really had a heart for God. They really feared the Lord. They were not Jews in name only.

They were Jews, as Paul put it, whose praise was not of men, but of God. Remember Paul said in Romans 2, verses 28 and 29, Paul said, He is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is that circumcision which is outward and of the flesh. But he is a Jew who is one inwardly, and that is circumcision which is of the heart and not of the flesh, and whose praise is not of men, but of God.

Paul said, A man is not even qualified for the name Jew if he only has outward qualifications. In other words, he is only physically born of the people of Abraham. That doesn't make a man a Jew.

Paul said, He is not a Jew who is one outwardly, but one who is inwardly. Paul only acknowledged true Jews to belong to the remnant. There were many Jewish people, Jesus even spoke to them and said they were their father the devil, who were not of that remnant.

But the remnant came to Christ and became what were later called Christians. Okay, now, we need to understand also another thing about the origin of the church, and that has to do with the institution of the synagogue. The synagogue was a very important institution in Judaism.

It was not, as far as we know, established by God. We need to know the difference between the temple and the synagogue. Back in the days of Moses, God instructed Moses that there should be constructed what was called the tabernacle, a portable building.

It was really just a prefab building made of wood boards and covered with curtains, which could be disassembled quickly in less than a day's time, put on carts, relocated, and set up in a day for use in a new location. It was like a modular building, kind of, not really fully modular, but it was quickly assembled from pre-cut parts and so forth. Now, that was to serve as a makeshift portable temple.

Now, God never did ever instruct the Jews to make a permanent temple, and Stephen points that out in his sermon, but David wanted to anyway, and to please David, God agreed to let his son Solomon build a temple, which he did. That temple became the center of Jewish religious life as long as it stood. In the days of Josiah, for example, all the people of Israel, or Judah, I should say, because the northern kingdom of Israel was no longer in those days, but all the people of Judah lived in general proximity of

Jerusalem.

They could, within a day or two, get there. And so, the temple was the focus of all their life. But in the days of the captivity, in the days when Nebuchadnezzar took the Jews away into Babylon for 70 years, he had destroyed the temple, and in order to maintain the integrity of the Jewish religion, somebody, nobody knows for sure who, but Jewish tradition says it was Ezra after the exile was over, established the institution of the synagogue.

Now, whereas there was only ever one temple at a time, and the Jews did rebuild the temple after the Babylonian exile, and it was still standing in the days of Jesus, though it isn't now, there was ever only one temple, and that stood always in Jerusalem and nowhere else. But wherever Jews were, after the diaspora, after the dispersion in the days of the Babylonian exile, there were synagogues. In every city, in every Gentile city, where there were more than ten adult male Jews, I should say, where there were ten adult male Jews, there was a synagogue.

No one knows exactly how this arose, but as I say, the Jewish tradition states that Ezra did it, and we don't have any way of knowing whether it was under divine instruction or not. But the synagogue became one of the most important things to Jewish survival. In fact, one reason that there is still a Jewish religion of sorts today, ever since the fall of the temple in 70 A.D., the reason Judaism survived is, for the most part, due, at least by natural considerations, to the fact of the synagogue.

If there were no synagogues, there would be nothing to keep the Jews attached to their religion with the temple gone. The temple was the focus of divinely ordained religion. But in Babylon, and then again since 70 A.D., the synagogue has kept the people of Israel cohesive and observing, in some measure, a religion that is distinctly their own.

It's not the religion of the Old Testament because they can't observe the religion of the Old Testament. There's no temple. There's no sacrifices.

There's no Levites. There's no priests. The religion of the Old Testament is not happening, has not happened since 70 A.D., and won't probably happen again unless it is in rebellion against God, which some people predict it will be.

There's different opinions about what the Scripture says about the future of this, but the point is, in the 2,000 years since the temple was destroyed, the synagogue has kept the Jews a religious people, a religious community. Now, the synagogues, if there were not 10, if there were not as many as 10 adult male Jews in a given city, there would be no synagogue. But the few Jews that might be in that city would nonetheless meet under a tree or at the riverside on Sabbath to pray, usually to pray.

That's how Paul found it in Philippi when he came there. There were less than 10 adult

Jews in Philippi of male gender, and therefore there was no synagogue. But in most of the cities Paul went to, he found a synagogue there.

And that was the first place he would go. It became an evangelism center. It was... As far as whether the synagogue was ordained of God or not, we don't know.

But we will say this, that Jesus seemed to legitimize it as an institution, not necessarily to give it divine sanction in the sense that God ordained the synagogue, but to say that it was a good thing. It was accomplishing something positive. In Matthew 23, Jesus said to his disciples in verses 2 and 3, The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat.

Now, Moses' seat is the reference to a particular chair on the platform of the synagogue from which the law of Moses was expounded by whatever teacher happened to be speaking that Sabbath. Moses' seat was the place from which the law was expounded. And Jesus said, The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat.

Therefore, whatever they tell you to observe, that observe and do. But do not do according to their works, for they say and they do not do. Now, Jesus assumed that the disciples would be attending synagogue on a regular basis.

He did, too, when he was on earth. And he said, You will hear there expounded the law of Moses from Moses' seat. Now, the people who are expounding it are not very good examples of how it is to be followed.

But they are expounding it. Therefore, do what they say. That is, they're expounding the word of God.

Do what the word of God says. Now, they aren't good examples, so don't follow their examples. But don't ignore what they're saying just because they're unworthy messengers, is what he's saying.

Even though you all know that they're hypocrites, don't rule out everything they're saying because they're sitting in Moses' seat expounding the law of Moses. And the law of Moses has authority no matter who's saying it. I think, frankly, this instruction is pretty good in terms of our relationship to the church, too, especially in an age where one might judge certain churches to be corrupt, or at least, you know, maybe not totally corrupt, but let's just say a lot of hypocrisy.

Most people think the church is full of hypocrites. Some people think all clergymen are hypocrites. This isn't the case, of course.

Not all of them are. Some of them probably are. But, you see, even if a man under whose preaching we sit is a hypocrite, if what he's saying is the Word of God, then do what he says.

Just don't do what he does. That's what Jesus said. It's better to be taught the Word of God in some setting at least than in none at all.

And although God didn't ordain the synagogue, just like He didn't ordain what we call the local church today, there's nothing of what we call a local church in the New Testament. It was starting... Some were starting to form in Corinth when Paul wrote 1 Corinthians, but he was aghast and rebuked them for it. The so-called local church today usually means a building over here or a group over here that are isolated in organization from other Christians who maybe live... Maybe they're meeting in a similar place two blocks away, but they have no relations to each other in terms of worship or ecclesiology or structure or authority or accountability.

They are separate. They're in the same town, but they're separate. You see, in the New Testament, there was only one church in the town, and when Corinth started to have a group over here who said, I'm of Paul, and another group down the street said, I'm of Cephas, and another said, I'm of Apollos, Paul said, What? I can't believe this.

Is Christ divided? But, of course, we don't get aghast anymore. We were born under this system, but it was certainly not what God had in mind. The institution, what we call a local church today, was not ordained by God.

We don't have any reference to it in the Bible. You will not find, for example, the expression local church in the Bible, nor will you find when it talks about the church in Corinth or the church in Philippi or the church in Thessalonica. You'll never find that it's referring to a group of people who are isolated from the other Christians in town, meeting with their own little membership in their own little separated ways and their own accountability among themselves, but not related.

They couldn't care less what the Christians meeting half a block away think of what they're doing, because they're not accountable to them. They're only accountable to these people. And who they're accountable to are half a country away at the headquarters in Springfield or somewhere else.

This idea is not found in Scripture, although we are going to study church history to the point where we will find out where it came from. But what I'm saying is that even though the synagogue of the Jews was not divinely ordained as far as we know, the Bible does not tell that it was, yet it was a place from which Scripture was expounded. It was a place where Jews of a pious sort could meet with other Jews of the same sort and hear the Word of God.

And of course, the day before there were printing presses and no one had a copy at home. That was the only place they could ever hear the Word of God. And so Jesus assumed that the disciples would be attending one of these buildings and they might be listening to a preacher who's altogether unworthy to handle the Word of God.

But if what he's giving is the Word of God, then do it. Don't reject what he's saying just because he's an unworthy messenger, is what Jesus said. And if the messengers were unworthy, we might dare say that Jesus would have judged the synagogues himself.

The whole system would be unworthy. If the people, even the people expounding the Word of God, were hypocrites, as Jesus said, that doesn't say much for anything else about the institution. And yet he assumed that even though there could be a great deal of corruption, if the Word of God can be found there, then obey the Word of God no matter what avenue it is communicated to you through.

So we have the synagogues as sort of a basic, original kind of local church. What we call a local church today had sort of its origins in the synagogue. They even had individual names for the synagogue.

The synagogues were named after certain people and so forth, just like our modern denominational churches are. There was a synagogue mentioned in Acts chapter 6, which was called the Synagogue of the Libertines. It was for Hellenistic Jews.

There were other synagogues around too. But what I'm saying is that wherever Jews existed in numbers, quantities that exceeded ten adult males in a town, there was a synagogue. This became very profitable eventually for Paul and for that matter for Jesus too because these synagogues were not only in Gentile lands.

Eventually they were in every city in Israel as well. And even in Jerusalem, where the temple was, there were still a variety of synagogues locally. The synagogue actually almost overshadowed the temple as the principal worship expression of the Jews in the days after the exile.

And that's fine because it gave Jesus the opportunity to speak to gathered groups in every town he went to. He knew where he could find people meeting to hear about God and hear the Scriptures. Furthermore, the synagogues allowed visiting teachers to fill the pulpit, even if they were relatively unknown because the synagogues didn't necessarily have a resident preacher.

The synagogues were ruled by what were called elders or rulers of the synagogue. From time to time in the Gospels we read of a ruler of the synagogue. The rich young ruler who came to Jesus was a ruler of a synagogue.

Also, Jairus, whose daughter died in Jesus' raising, he was a ruler of a synagogue. Well, the rulers of the synagogues were not like rulers of lands, like kings. They were simply... They presided over the Sabbath service at the synagogue.

And there was, as near as we can tell, a plurality of elders in the synagogues. And this is thought to have perhaps in some way guided the apostles when they finally did establish congregations. They established a plurality of elders in their congregations also.

Most scholars believe that the structure of the early Christian assemblies under a plurality of elders was borrowed from the concept of the synagogue, which was governed or ruled by a plurality of elders. Now, the synagogue became one of the first launching pads for the church mission. It was there that Jesus found the remnant in many cases.

And where Paul found the remnant when he went and preached. In Luke 4, verse 16, just one of the many times in the Gospels, it talks about Jesus preaching in the synagogue. It says in that place that when Jesus was in Nazareth, He went into the synagogue as He was accustomed to do.

And there He was invited to speak. By this time, He was a minor celebrity and known to be a teacher and a rabbi of sorts, though He had not been academically trained, which caused the Pharisees to marvel that He could say anything of value without having academic training in theology. They sometimes marveled at that and said, How does this man be able to do that when he's had no formal study? Well, it says in Luke 4, verse 16, So He came to Nazareth where He had been brought up, and as His custom was, this had already become a modus operandi of Jesus, He went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day and stood up to read.

And He read on this particular occasion from Isaiah, and then He sat down and expounded it, which was what was typically done. Paul, also having rabbinic training, was invited to speak in the synagogues when he'd go to any town, and that's where he started. The synagogues became the launching pad for the church in every town, because there you would find in every town, especially in the Gentile towns, that's the only place you'd really find the people who already had some kind of dedication to the God of Israel.

You'd have Jews in every Gentile community, and among them, some would be faithful remnant people. And so Paul and his companions would go into those synagogues, find those people, tell them about the Messiah. Those people would usually get kicked out of the synagogue along with Paul, and Paul would be run out of town, and they'd end up meeting in a home and calling it a church.

And that's how the church got started in most places, according to the book of Acts. We have examples of that frequently given in the book of Acts, and also we see Jesus frequently in the synagogues in the Gospels as well. In fact, in John 18, verse 20, when Jesus was arrested and He was being interrogated about what His doctrine was and so forth, He was not a very cooperative witness.

He didn't have a Fifth Amendment to plead, but He kind of acted like He did and refused to answer and refused to give much information. And on one occasion, it says the high priest in verse 19, John 18, 19, the high priest asked Jesus about His disciples and His doctrine. Jesus answered, I spoke openly to the world.

I always taught in the synagogues and in the temple where the Jews always meet, and in secret I have said nothing. So Jesus states that His ministry of the past three and a half years has largely been always speaking in the synagogues and in the temple. Wherever the Jews always meet, He had been there, and He'd been quite public about what He said.

Also in Acts 18, verse 4, we find Paul at Corinth. It says, And he reasoned in the synagogues every Sabbath and persuaded both Jews and Greeks. Every Sabbath when Paul was in town, until he got kicked out and they wouldn't let him do it anymore, he reasoned and preached in the synagogues.

This is where Paul preferred to go for two reasons. One is, as I already said, he'd find the remnant Jews there. Another reason is he found remnant Gentiles there.

Now the Jewish Old Testament didn't really use the term remnant referring to Gentiles very much, but there were in the synagogues a class of Gentiles who were not proselytes. That is, they had not converted to Judaism. There were Gentiles who did.

They were called proselytes. They'd actually get circumcised and be full, you know, privileged, card-carrying Jews. But there were Gentiles who were not fully proselytes, and the main reason is they didn't want to get circumcised, and who can blame them? But they still were attracted to the religious ideas of the Jews more than to the pagans and their gods, Mount Olympus, and all that junk.

And so these people were called God-fearing Gentiles. Cornelius in Caesarea was one of these God-fearing Gentiles in Caesarea. We're told that he was a Gentile who feared God, and he prayed and he contributed to the synagogue and so forth.

So there were a lot of these God-fearing Gentiles, and when Paul came or someone came to the synagogue and preached there, these God-fearers were already in the synagogue service. And when they'd hear about Jesus and they heard that they could be saved by faith without circumcision, they loved that message, and they followed him in large numbers. In fact, many times Paul got the largest yield from his preaching in the synagogue, not from the Jewish element, but from the Gentile element there.

And so the churches were formed at the expense, as it were, of the synagogue. Those who had been attending synagogues ended up in the church and usually ended up not in the synagogue anymore. In fact, the Bible indicates that there were apparently established Christian synagogues.

Now, this would not be the case for Gentiles probably. And it probably... It's really hard to know how common these were, but we know that in James there's reference to the synagogue that the Christians meet in. Now, it's possible they were going to the Jewish synagogue still.

It's hard to say. But James assumes that his readers are Christians, although they're also Jews. James 1.1 is addressed to the 12 tribes that are scattered abroad, which are the Jews.

However, in chapter 2, he makes reference to those who blaspheme that... Well, I should say in verse 1, actually he says, My brethren, do not hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of Glory, with partiality. So obviously he presumes that these Jews, he's referring to, are Christians. They hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ.

But in verse 2 he says, For if there should come into your assembly... The word in the Greek there for assembly is your synagogue. If there come into your synagogue a man with a gold ring and fine apparel, and he talks about, you know, giving preferential treatment to the rich. He actually refers to these believers in Jesus Christ, these Jewish believers, as being in a synagogue.

Now, that might have been just the local synagogues they were located in, and they were having Sabbath meetings along with the unsaved Jews. But many feel that the Christian Jews, especially in Christian areas, Christian, I should say, in Jewish areas, probably just started, you know, synagogues that were Christian in nature. And in fact, it might have been very hard to tell the difference between a Christian synagogue and a Christian congregation of another sort, since the Christian congregations tended to take on the pattern of the synagogue.

The synagogue was mainly made up of people gathered to pray, to sing, to hear the Scripture read, and to hear exhortations and comments about the Scripture. That certainly is what happens in most churches, too. And so the synagogue service was very much like the church service.

Also, you could be excommunicated from the synagogue. You could be thrown out. And there were elders of the synagogue who could do that to you.

And so apparently it is true with the early church as well. So we see the synagogue is sort of the prototype of the Christian congregations and provided the launching pad for ministry in almost everywhere that the early message went, including that of Jesus Himself. Jesus preached regularly in the synagogues, and from there He gathered the remnant of Israel to Himself.

Now, the movement Jesus started, as I pointed out in our last lecture, was not in all points identical with what we sometimes call the church today. They had some things different about it than an institutional church. For one thing, the movement He started was made up entirely of believers, entirely of the faithful remnant.

Jesus did not start an institution which could be entered by birth from Christian parents or which could be joined without repentance. Jesus started a family which was not at all

institutionalized, which was made up of those who wanted to forsake everything and follow Him. And those are the only people who traveled with Him.

True, He spoke to enormous crowds at times, but they were not His congregation. They were His stadium for evangelism. They were His evangelistic crusade.

He would speak to multitudes, even feed them. He had tremendous outreaches to them. But the Bible says in the fourth chapter of Mark that to the multitudes, Jesus never spoke without a parable, but to His disciples He expounded all things privately.

In other words, He never really explained anything about the kingdom of God to the multitudes. They were not His church. He would tell them parables, but He did that so they might see and not perceive and hear and not understand, He told His disciples.

He wasn't really casting His pearls before swine, but He would preach to an audience and from there, those among them who were hungry for God would perceive that this man was talking about the kingdom of God, but I don't understand what he's saying. I must find out. I must seek further.

I must ask Him. And these people would attach themselves to Jesus and follow Him and ask for His teaching and counsel and so forth, and they would be His students, His followers. And when they did, they were called disciples.

And He explained all things privately to His disciples. I didn't give you the verse number there because I don't have it memorized. I think it's Mark 4:34, but I guess I'd have to make sure that verse number.

I know it's Mark 4. I'm just not sure exactly what verse that is. Yeah, it's Mark 4:34. But without a parable, He did not speak to them, meaning the multitudes.

And when they were alone, He explained all things to His disciples. The explaining of the things of the kingdom of God was only done to those who had a commitment to Him, who were following Him, in many cases, at the expense of all that they had. To be included in His movement required that someone was following what He said.

Jesus said that in John 8:31. He said, If you continue in My words, that means if you do what I say, if you continue doing what I say, if it becomes your lifestyle to obey what I teach. He said, if you continue in My words, then you are My disciples indeed. So to be a disciple in the early days meant that a person would continue under the teaching of Jesus and follow what He said.

Likewise, Jesus said in Luke 6:46, Why do you call Me Lord, Lord? And you don't do the things that I say. You see, Jesus didn't figure anyone belonged in His movement who called Him Lord, but didn't mean it. On the other hand, no one was in it who didn't call Him Lord.

There is no place in the New Testament that we read of people who accepted Jesus as their personal Lord. In fact, the idea of accepting Jesus as your personal Savior is a very modern evangelical term. It's not found in the Bible nor in church history until recent evangelical jargon came to be formed.

But accepting Jesus as your personal Savior is a very common term in modern evangelicalism. But you don't find the concept. You don't accept Jesus as your Savior.

You embrace Jesus as your Lord and you find Him to be your Savior in the act of it. The Bible says, Unto us is born this day in the city of David a Savior who is Christ the Lord. He doesn't become anyone's Savior until He becomes their Lord.

You can't have part of Him and not the other part. In fact, it says in Romans 10, If you will confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved. That is, upon acknowledging and embracing Jesus as your Lord, you will be saved.

He'll be your Savior then, but only on those conditions. So to be a part of Jesus' movement in the early days meant that you had to embrace Him and confess Him to be Lord. But if you call Him Lord, He expects you to do the things He said.

And if you did the things He said and continued in them, then you were considered to be a true disciple, or as He put it, My disciples indeed. How did you join the movement? What was the initiation? Well, Jesus put it this way in Matthew 16, 24, If any man come after Me, let him deny himself, take up his cross, and follow Me. Now that didn't involve, as near as we can tell, putting your name down on a church membership list.

It didn't even say anything about how often you had to go to meetings or what percentage of your money you had to give. None of that. All He said is, If you want to follow Me, if you want to be one of My disciples, you need to deny yourself, you need to take up your cross, and follow Me.

I'll tell you, it's a lot easier just to join a church today, agree to pay 10%, and to attend the church, and make sure that at least one of the pews is warmed by your presence, and be a member in good standing until the day you die. But taking up your cross and denying yourself and following Jesus, this is much more costly. I dare say that the church was made up of a sterner stuff in the days of Jesus than the typical church member would be rightly described today.

Now, on the day of Pentecost, there were some more conditions stated, but not really any very different than what Jesus stated. On the day of Pentecost, when they said to Peter, after he preached, What shall we do? He answered in Acts 2.38. He said, Well, repent, and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. So, again, joining the church

meant you repent of your sins.

That's first and foremost. No one was in the church who didn't repent. At least they weren't supposed to be.

Then they were baptized, usually on the same day, as the book of Acts demonstrates. And they also were received the gift of the Holy Spirit. So that to be a part of the church required that you have the Holy Spirit.

You have to be spiritual. It's a spiritual joining. It's not joining a club.

There was no membership like a club membership. There was rather membership of the sort that the Bible describes like members of a body joined together by one spirit. It's a spiritual phenomenon, the church that Jesus started.

And to be part of it, you had to receive the Spirit upon repentance and water baptism, according to Acts 2.38, which is the first place in the New Testament after Jesus ascended that gives any instructions about joining the movement. So we have inclusion in the movement is based on acceptance and embracing of the Lordship of Jesus and being a follower of His words and being a disciple. Becoming a Christian requires that you deny yourself, take up a cross, eventually repent.

It's early on there. I mean, we read that. You get baptized.

You follow Jesus. You receive the Holy Spirit. These are the things that made a person transfer from not being in the movement to being in it, from not being in the church to being in the church.

Now, there's something I want to bring out that is not always as clear in people's minds as I think it needs to be about the church while Jesus was on earth. Things changed considerably, of course, for the church when Jesus ascended because whereas when He was on earth, people could look at Jesus. They could ask Him questions.

They could hear Him answer back. They could hear with their ears what He said. There was never any question.

Is that the voice of the devil? Is that the voice of Jesus? Is that my imagination? None of that kind of stuff. Jesus was there, tangible, audible, visible, but only one place at a time. And you couldn't really be with Him unless you were in that one place on the planet at that moment that He happened to be.

So when Jesus said, Follow me, following Jesus actually meant geographical movement because Jesus was an itinerant preacher. He'd go from here to there and to somewhere else. And to follow Him meant He'd go where He goes, which means that those who followed Him during the time of the Gospels were actually kind of unsettled in terms of

their domicile.

They had to leave the houses and lands and things like that to follow Jesus. That doesn't mean that they didn't own them still. Peter, for example, certainly one who followed Jesus, had a home and they returned to it from time to time and made it an outreach center in Capernaum, as you can see from reading the Gospels.

But Peter had to be mobile. He couldn't be tied down to his fishing business. He had to leave that behind and travel with Jesus.

That's what following Jesus meant. Is that what it means now? Sadly, many people have not discerned that some things have changed since Jesus left. And there are some people who actually feel the only way you can really be a disciple today is to not have a home, not have any possessions, not raise a family, but just stay on the move all the time, just float around unstable, unsettled.

Now, there are people who are called to do that. We call them itinerant preachers or missionaries or something else. But that is not necessarily required of all people who follow Jesus today.

Because Jesus is more than one place at once now. Through His Spirit, He is in all places. That's why He said it's advantageous for you that I leave.

Because if I don't leave, the Holy Spirit will not come. With the coming of the Holy Spirit, it has allowed Jesus to be encountered everywhere that human beings are that believe in Him. Now, even when Jesus was on the earth, there were people who were saved who didn't follow Him around.

There were people who were believers who were truly saved but didn't follow Him. One of the most obvious examples of that is the man of the tombs whose story is found in Mark 5 and also in, I think, Matthew 8. I think it's in there. But you know the story.

The man lived in the tombs, cut himself, was naked, and Jesus cast the legion of demons out of him into the swine. They go into the lake and die. Jesus gets kicked out of town and the guy wants to go with Him.

Do you remember? The Gospels say the man begged Jesus that he could follow with Him and be with Him. But Jesus forbade him. He said, No, you can't go with Me.

You go back to your home. You go back to your neighbors. And you tell them the great things that God has done for you.

Here's a man who is a true believer in Jesus Christ, truly saved, but he wasn't allowed to follow Jesus around. Jesus had another plan for him. He was not to become mobile in the sense of traveling with Jesus.

In fact, his evangelism wasn't even a mobile evangelism. He was to go back to his home and just testify from there. So there were people who were saved and believed and had Jesus' full approval who didn't travel with Him.

Mary and Martha and Lazarus who lived in Bethany. We never read that they traveled with Jesus. Not once.

Yet they were clearly some of His best friends and believers and truly part of His church, part of the remnant. Even John, and I brought this up I think last time to make a different point, but in Luke 9, verses 49 and 50, John was upset because there was a guy who didn't follow with them who was casting out demons in Jesus' name. And John thought that was inappropriate because he wasn't part of their fellowship.

He says, John answered and said, Master, we saw someone casting out demons in your name and we forbade him because he does not follow with us. And Jesus said, don't forbid him for he who is not against us is for us. Now here's a man casting out demons in Jesus' name.

He obviously believes in Jesus. Jesus actually said the guy is for us. Now I don't know if Jesus actually knew this man personally, but the man obviously knew who Jesus was and believed in Him.

And Jesus said, don't forbid him. He's one of ours. He's for us.

He's not against us. He doesn't follow with us. But you see, there were people, even when Jesus was on the earth, who didn't follow with Him, but they believed in Him.

He was the Lord. They recognized His authority. You don't try to cast demons out of people in Jesus' name unless you have some inkling that that's an authoritative name.

And so we see that there was a distinction between a believer and a follower while Jesus was on earth. But that's because not everyone could geographically move around with Him. But since Jesus ascended into heaven, believers and followers are kind of the same thing.

We follow Him in the sense we follow His teachings and we follow His leading in our lives, which may include geographical motion or may not. From the day we get saved to the day we die, He might call us to live in one house and never leave the boundaries of the town we live in. But we still follow Him in the sense that He's leading us in our lives in the things we do.

We're following His authority. We're following His lordship. We're following His teaching.

And so the movement began based upon the lordship of Jesus and the members of the church were called disciples. In fact, what we call... We use the word Christian today, but

the word Christian was first applied to people who were previously called disciples. And we see that, of course, in the 11th chapter of Acts where we're getting the story of the founding of the church in Antioch.

And in that chapter, Acts 11, verse 26, the last line of that verse says, And the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch. That means that the word Christian never meant anything in the Bible except disciples. The disciples just got a new name in Antioch.

They didn't become a different class of people qualified on different bases. They were still disciples. They just were now called Christians.

So that the members of the church were the disciples of Jesus. Eventually, in some locales, they came to be called Christians. In fact, we call them Christians today, too.

But unfortunately, the word Christian now has been diluted as much as the word Jew or Israel was diluted in the Old Testament. A person who didn't love God or believe in God in any way, shape, or form could still be part of the institutional Israel. And unfortunately, in our times, a person who doesn't know or believe in God or love Him in any way, shape, or form can be called a Christian and part of the institutional church.

But that was not the case in the beginning. It was not so. Now, let me talk to you about some of the major features of the early church because we're going to run out of time if I don't move along here.

Some things we need to understand because these have ramifications on how we understand the later church history. The early church took for granted something called apostolic authority. That is to say, they had apostles and the apostles had unique authority in the church.

Their authority was not that of a dictator or a tyrant or even of a ruler per se because Jesus said, it shall not be so among you. He said, the rulers of the Gentiles exercise authority over them but it shall not be so among you. But those who would be chief among you must be the servants of all.

So, the authority of the apostles was not an authority bending people into submission. The authority of the apostles was simply recognized to be the authority of Christ vested in representatives. And since everybody in the church was subject to the authority of Christ, they willingly were subject to the authority of His apostles.

Now, the word apostle means one who is sent and sent in a particular and official capacity. Somebody who is sent as an agent or a representative. And Jesus, as we find in Mark chapter 3, selected certain people to be apostles.

Not all the disciples were apostles. All the church members were disciples but only a few of the disciples were apostles. Now, Jesus said in John 13, 20, He that receives him that I

send receives me.

And an apostle is one who is sent. Whoever receives an apostle of Christ receives Christ. That is, the authority of the apostles was judged to be equal or equivalent to the authority of Christ in the early church.

Now, Jesus didn't bully people either. He had total authority over His disciples but He didn't bully them at all. He said, the Son of Man didn't come to be served but to serve.

And He gave His life a ransom for many. And He washed the disciples' feet and said, that's what I want you to do, you apostles. I'm your Lord.

I have authority over you and I wash your feet. What's that tell you? I want you to wash each other's feet. This kind of authority is the only kind that Jesus ever authorized.

But to know what an apostle was, you'd need to turn probably to Mark chapter 3 to begin with because that's where Mark introduces the apostles for the first time. Now, some of the individuals who became apostles were introduced earlier in Mark but they weren't introduced as apostles. They simply were introduced at the time that they became disciples.

But in Mark chapter 3, we read of the founding of the office of the apostle. Verses 14 and 15, it says, Jesus then appointed twelve that they might be with Him and that He might send them out to preach. That's why they're called apostles.

They're sent ones. And to have power to heal sicknesses and to cast out demons. Now, these are the things He selected the apostles for.

That they might be with Him, that He might send them out to preach, and that they might have power to cast out demons and heal sicknesses. Now, it's interesting that all of these things were recognized as belonging to the credentials of an apostle. The first of them, that they might be with Him.

In the book of Acts, after Judas had hanged himself and there was a vacancy in the apostolate, Peter felt it necessary to replace Judas and to fill that vacancy. And notice when he's suggesting how they select candidates to fill the void. He says in Acts chapter 1, verses 21 and 22, Therefore, of these men who have accompanied us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John to that day when He was taken up from us, one of these must become witness with us of His resurrection.

So, to replace Judas required finding somebody who had been with Jesus all the time, from the beginning of John's ministry up on through the time of the ascension of Christ. That is to say, an apostle, at least at that point in time, had to have that experience. That experience of having known Jesus up close, personal, while Jesus was on the earth.

And, of course, that's what we saw in Mark chapter 3. Jesus chose the apostles to be with Him. That they would have an experience with Him. In Acts chapter 4 or 5, we read that the Sanhedrin, looking on Peter and John and the man that they healed of their lameness, it says they took note of them that they had been with Jesus.

The apostles had an authority in the church partly based on the fact that they had been with Jesus more than anybody else. Jesus allowed the apostles to spend time with Him that He did not allow anyone else to spend time with Him. He would leave the multitudes and just take off across the lake and the boat with the disciples, the apostles, excuse me, in order to spend time alone with them.

They were permitted to be with Him virtually all the time. The crowds were often sent away. These people had heard Jesus more, watched Jesus more.

They had been instructed more profoundly and more deeply and more specifically by Jesus. And therefore, they obviously had an innate authority to speak as His agents. In John chapter 15, Jesus said to the apostles in the upper room, John 15, verse 27, Jesus said to His apostles, And you also will bear witness because you have been with Me from the beginning.

So being with Jesus was one of the credentials of the apostles until a little later when there became many Christians who had never had a chance to see Jesus. There were a few of those who eventually were called apostles too, like Paul and Barnabas and some others. We don't know that Barnabas ever saw Jesus.

We know that Paul didn't or if he did, he didn't follow Jesus for his lifetime. So this qualification was waived in a few cases later on. But the initial 12 were selected and had their authority because of having been with Jesus, first of all.

Secondly, another of their credentials and very important is that they were commissioned by Jesus. An apostle, one who is sent as an emissary, one who is sent in an official capacity, has to be commissioned and sent. Jesus said to the 12 in the upper room in John 20, verse 21, As the Father has sent Me, so send I you.

I realize sometimes we apply those scriptures to Christians generally, but there were no Christians there except the apostles. And Jesus was saying that they were being sent, apostolized, in the same sense that Jesus was sent by His Father. Now, I mean, I could say in a way less literally, I feel like God has sent me to McMinnville to minister here, but I would not make a similar claim.

I couldn't make a claim that even was similar to that of the apostles. I can't say as God sent Jesus into the world, so God sent me, or Jesus sent me to McMinnville. Now, I can't be so sure of that because God sent Jesus into the world to be His official spokesman.

And the rejection of Jesus is the rejection of God. And Jesus said in that same way, I'm

sending you guys, the apostles, to reject them would be to reject Jesus. And that's how it was understood.

He that receives Him that I send receives Me, Jesus said. So they have a special commission. Now, we know Paul had that commission.

We know he didn't fellowship with Jesus while Jesus was on earth, but Jesus did appear to him and speak with him and commission him and send him to be an apostle to the Gentiles. Now, whenever people ask me today, do you believe there are apostles today? Well, certainly one thing I have to say, well, what are we calling an apostle? Usually the people who believe in apostles, they believe that a person is an apostle by doing apostolic activities. What is apostolic activity? Well, if you talk to people who think they know of a living apostle, usually they'll say that person, well, he plants churches.

He oversees groups of churches. He's a troubleshooter. When churches have trouble, they call him in and they look to him as sort of a wise leader and so forth.

And so he sort of has this network of churches that view him as having something, authority maybe higher than the pastor. And therefore, he's an apostle. Well, those things may be true of apostles, but those aren't the things that make someone an apostle.

You don't become a sent one by planting a church. You don't become a sent one by being consulted by a group of pastors who think you're smarter than they are. You become a sent one by being sent.

You become an apostle by being commissioned by Jesus Christ to be his official spokesperson. And you may do any number of apostolic kinds of activities without having the office of an apostle. Just like you might prophesy in a meeting without having the office of a prophet.

Or you might teach someone without having the office of a teacher. Paul says, are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? The answer is no. But everyone might teach in some situations.

Everyone might prophesy in some situations. And there might be any number of people who do apostolic kinds of things. But that doesn't make someone an apostle.

An apostle's credentials are that he was commissioned by Christ. As the Father sent me, so I'm sending you. Rejection of you is the same thing as rejection of me, Jesus is saying.

Now that is a heavy thing. I cannot say that. I can't say, well, if you reject what I'm saying to you tonight, you reject Jesus.

That just isn't true. I'm not infallible. And I don't have the authority to say that.

There might be any number of things I say that you'd be quite right to reject. Because I know in part, and I prophesy in part, and I haven't been commissioned to be God's official spokesperson for the whole church to listen to. But Paul was, Peter was, James was, John was.

These were apostles. They were commissioned and they had a special authority recognized by all in the early church. Also, remember, Jesus called twelve that they might be with him, that he might send them out to preach, that's through commissioning.

And what? And have power to heal sicknesses and cast out demons. The miracles and signs done by the apostles was one of the ways in which they demonstrated that their claim to being commissioned wasn't just blowing smoke. They really had the power to back it up and prove it.

Paul himself appealed to this on one occasion with the Corinthians when there were people in the Corinthian church doubting whether Paul had the legitimate claim to be an apostle. And he said in 2 Corinthians 12-12, Truly, the signs of an apostle were accomplished among you with all perseverance in signs and wonders and mighty deeds. The signs and wonders and mighty deeds were signs of an apostle.

They were apostolic signs. Now, just like someone could plant a church without being an apostle, someone might do signs without being an apostle too. Stephen did signs.

Philip did signs. They weren't apostles. But an apostle would certainly do signs.

What this means is that if we see a person doing signs and wonders, that doesn't prove he's an apostle. But if a person claims to be an apostle, he isn't one unless he's doing signs and wonders. That is to say, others besides apostles might do signs and wonders, but certainly apostles do because those are the signs of apostleship.

Anyone who claims to have a supernatural commission should be able to put his money where his mouth is and show some supernatural evidence of it. And the early apostles had no trouble doing that because that's what it meant to be an apostle. Now, what were the apostles for? How did they exercise their authority in the early church? Well, they didn't set up a big mega church and walk around like CEOs or like members of the board of directors and pull a rank on people and stuff like that.

That didn't happen. Mainly, what the apostles did was they testified to what they knew. They were like witnesses in a court of law testifying to what they had seen.

Remember, I read a moment ago in Jesus' statement to them. Excuse me. In John 15, he said, And you also will bear witness of me because you've been with me from the beginning.

That's what they were to do. Principally, to bear witness. We read a moment ago in Acts chapter 1. Peter said, We need to choose someone who's been with us from the time Jesus began in the ministry of John to the time he was taken up so that he can together with us be a witness of the resurrection.

One of the principal activities of the apostles and that they were chosen for was to bear witness, especially to bear witness of the resurrection. They had seen Jesus after his resurrection and their witness was principally tied up with that experience of having seen him. In Acts 4.33, it says, And with great power the apostles gave witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus.

So, the apostles were primarily witnesses, eyewitnesses of the resurrection. That makes it awful hard, too, for a modern guy to be an apostle in that sense, since you'd have to be very old by now to have witnessed the resurrection of Jesus and still hold the apostolic office today. We'll talk later on, before we close, about the doctrine of apostolic succession, which is a key doctrine in the Roman Catholic Church.

They believe there are apostles today. They're called the Pope and the bishops. And they believe that they have apostolic authority, just like the early apostles did.

We'll talk about what's wrong with that view in a moment. In 1 John 1, verse 1, John said, That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon at our hands of handle to the Word of life. And then he says, in verse 3, That which we have seen and heard, we declare to you.

So, we have seen it, we have heard it, we were there, and we testify of it, he says. We apostles, that is, John and his apostolic companions. In addition to testifying of the resurrection of Jesus, the apostles also initially provided all the teaching for the early church.

Jesus had told them in the Great Commission, Go and make disciples, teaching them to observe all things whichever I've commanded you. So, they began their ministry in addition to testifying with teaching the church. The early Christians on the day of Pentecost and the times that followed in Acts chapter 2, sat daily under the apostles' doctrine or the apostles' teaching.

And this is how the apostolic authority was exercised. Not through giving orders and commands, but by teaching what Jesus said. That's what they were to do, to teach the disciples to observe all things whatsoever Jesus commanded.

So, that's what they did. In other words, they testified to the unbeliever and when they became believers, they taught them. The church, the early church, was not a preaching service.

Today, every church is thought to need a preacher. We don't know that the early

churches ever had preachers in them. The preachers, according to the book of Acts, were preaching the gospel to the heathen.

The preaching, if you'll do a study on the word preach, and it takes a long time because it occurs a lot of time in the New Testament. I did it. You look up the word preach in the New Testament, you'll find that preaching was in every case, except one time, distinctly said to be preaching the gospel to unbelievers.

Only one time is an exception. That's when Paul met with the Christians entire upstairs that night when Eutychus fell out the window and died and Paul raised him up. It says that Paul preached until midnight.

Now, it looks like that might be a case where he's preaching to the church, but I don't know. There might have been more unbelievers there than believers. It's hard to say.

We don't know. If he was preaching to the Christians on that occasion, it's the only instance in the Bible where preaching was said to be done to Christians. No, you teach Christians.

Why? Preaching is to get these people to do what's right, to repent of their sins, to come to God and start obeying God. Teaching is done to people who already have obedient hearts. They just need to know what they're supposed to do.

That's what teaching is. Christians have new hearts. God has taken away the stony heart and put in a heart of flesh.

He's written his laws in their hearts. They're inclined toward obedience. That's what conversion does to a person.

It changes the heart. Now, the person who's converted needs to be taught what Jesus said to do. And they're motivated.

They don't have to be preached at. They just need to be taught. You might say, well, you don't know my church.

Those people need to be preached at every Sunday. I said real Christians. Now, I'm not the one who judges who's a real Christian and who's not.

But I'll let the Bible judge. If a person's a real Christian, God has written his laws on their inward parts. And it says, I will make you walk in my statutes.

A person who's born again has a new heart. Well, not the people in my church. Well, I said if they've been born again.

The Bible says if they're born again, they have a new heart. If they don't have a new heart, they're not born again. It's that simple.

I don't know why people make it so hard. But the thing is, the churches are so full of unbelievers, that they have to be preached to. And so some churches, the one I grew up in, which was a Baptist church, an evangelical church, believed in the gospel, believed in the Bible.

The preacher preached nothing but the gospel every week. Because he assumed he had a room full of unsaved people. Gave an altar call every time.

It was the high point of every service. Did the saints ever get taught how to observe all things decently? Not in the 16 years I was there, however long it was. I never heard any teaching along those lines.

I even went to Sunday school. They taught things there, but not that. I'll tell you, the early church was made up of believers.

And the believers didn't have to be preached at. They had to be taught. And so what did the believers do? They sat daily under the apostles' teaching.

And so that's what the apostles did. What the apostles said, by the way, became normative. And that's the third thing, and the most important thing about the apostles' authority.

Different teachers had different views on different things. But the apostles' views became normative. They sat under the teaching of the apostles.

And the apostles' views became normative. When there was a dispute among Christians over circumcision, for example, do the Jewish believers and the Gentile believers have to be circumcised when they get saved? The Jews don't, because they were circumcised at eight days old before they were saved. But the Gentiles, should they be circumcised when they get saved? That was disputed.

Some Christians thought yes, some thought no. Although Paul thought the ones who said no were Paul's brethren, he said in Galatians. But the church in Jerusalem thought they were real brethren, so there might have been even a dispute as to whether they were really saved or not, even among different people.

But they called a council of the apostles in Acts chapter 15 to discuss it. And the apostles decided the question. Once it was decided by them, no more debate.

At least no more legitimate debate. All true Christians accepted the norms established by the apostles. Why? Because they were sent by Jesus with His authority to do that kind of thing.

That is why I accept every apostolic teaching. People say, I don't like what Paul said about this or that. I don't think I agree with him about women and so forth.

I think Paul made a few mistakes here and there. Well, I can't tell you Paul never made a mistake in his life. I'm sure he did.

Peter made some. Paul even had to rebuke them. The apostles were capable of making mistakes, but when they set norms for the church, those stick.

The boss may not always be right, but he's always the boss. And if Jesus invested the apostles with His authority to speak in His name as His agents, then that's good enough for me. I don't believe Paul made any mistakes in the scriptures.

I don't believe that, I mean, in his personal life maybe, but what he wrote as normative for the church, I believe he was right on with the Lord on those things. But even if he says, I have no word from the Lord about this, but I give my judgment as one who's obtained mercy to be faithful, I say that's good enough for me, Paul. You don't need a commandment from the Lord.

You have a commission from the Lord. That's good enough for me. You give your judgment, and I'll say yes, sir, because He has the authority.

The apostles have the authority to set the norms. Anyone who rises up against the authority of the apostles is rising up against Jesus Christ Himself, who appointed them and sent them as His official spokesmen. And that is why we accept the authority of the New Testament, because all of it was written by apostles or by at least people under their supervision with their approval.

Moving, I hope, more quickly now, the Holy Spirit plays a dominant role in the early church. Modern churches sometimes try to import the Holy Spirit into their activity too, but it doesn't work so well when it has to be imported in the activity. The Holy Spirit was sovereign and moving and doing surprising things in the early church.

In fact, everything that was not done by the Spirit was considered not to be worth doing at all. The Holy Spirit was the life of the church. And the reason for that is because the church was a continuation of Jesus.

It is His body, of His flesh and of His bones, Paul said in Ephesians 5. And Jesus' life was a supernatural life. And the church's life was a supernatural life. Every person in the church was supernaturally reborn.

You didn't come into the church like you joined the Kiwanis club. You joined the church by a supernatural transformation that takes place in your life. And that's the only way to get into the legitimate church.

And Jesus said to His disciples in Acts 1, verse 8, You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. And so Jesus indicated that the Holy Spirit's power in the church is that which would make it distinctive. In fact, the disciples who had been well trained

as preachers under Jesus were not allowed to preach until the Holy Spirit came.

Because it wasn't their training as preachers that was going to be effective. It was going to be the Holy Spirit's power that was. So throughout the book of Acts, we read again and again, Peter filled with the Holy Spirit said, Paul filled with the Spirit said, And the Spirit guided him, and the Spirit led him, and the Spirit forbade him, and the Spirit did this, and the Spirit did that.

This is how the book of Acts is always talking. Why? Because Luke is telling us when he writes this, this was the Holy Spirit enfleshed in people. Just like Jesus Christ was the Holy Spirit enfleshed in a human person.

Jesus said, If I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God shall come upon you. It says in Acts 1, that Jesus had given His instructions to His disciples through the Holy Spirit. Jesus was simply the Holy Spirit in action through a human person.

I mean, Jesus' physical body was just like yours. He got tired, He had to eat, He was capable of dying, bleeding, all that. His body wasn't supernatural.

It's who was in there that made Him different from anyone else. It was God in the flesh. God manifests in the flesh, but that flesh was flesh.

In Him dwelt all the fullness of the Godhead bodily, but that body was just an ordinary body. But who was in there was what's different. Now, that who was in there was given to the people of God.

And they became the body of Christ through the receiving of the Holy Spirit. So said Paul in 1 Corinthians 12, verse 13, says, By one Spirit were we all baptized into one body. We were baptized into the body of Christ by the Spirit of God, by receiving the Spirit of God.

And the Holy Spirit was sovereign in the early church. What He did was what got done. And, you know, whenever something was done without the Spirit, which wasn't very often recorded in the book of Acts, you know, that never accomplished anything of any value.

In Acts 2, 47, we read that the church grew because God added daily those who were being saved. There were no big church growth seminars going on to teach you all this sociological tricks to get more people to come to your church. It wasn't happening.

God added. Why? Because God was running the church in those days. Still does, the true church.

But, obviously, there are organizations, unfortunately, called churches. It only confuses the world about what the church is. Glorious church hardly looks glorious to the world because they don't understand what is meant by the word.

They think these organizations are churches and some of these don't appear to be run by God at all. Some of them certainly have a lot of godly people and they honor God in the way they're run, but there's an awful lot of organizations, sadly, called churches that aren't run by God. But God built and ran the church through the Holy Spirit operating through His people.

The same Holy Spirit who's available today, by the way, and whom Christians have, but certainly not all Christians are filled with the Holy Spirit else they wouldn't have to be exhorted to be as Paul exhorts Christians to be. He talks about some of the earliest Gentile missionary efforts that are spontaneous. In Acts 11, 21, it says, The hand of the Lord was with them and a great number believed and turned to the Lord.

God's power was in it. God's anointing, God's hand, God's sovereign growing of the church was going on. Now, there was organization, but the impression is the apostles didn't sit down in the upper room and figure out a constitution and a charter and an organization and a flow chart.

That didn't happen. All they did is wait for the Spirit to come. When the Spirit came, they just preached as they knew best to do and people got saved and then they just started teaching the people.

But eventually, they had to organize somewhat. In Acts chapter 6, we see the first attempt at conscious organization of the church and it was very minimal. The apostles had been distributing the food as well as doing all the preaching.

That got to be too much. The food distribution was not being handled quite right. So, they appointed some guys and gave them authority to do that.

So, they made some church officers. The first church officers, except for the apostles, where we usually call them deacons, although they're not called that in Acts chapter 6, but they did the work that deacons do. So, they would organize as necessary, as the occasion demanded.

We don't read necessarily that these deacons or that there were corresponding deacons in every church that the apostles established. Though, later on, Paul encouraged Titus and Timothy to establish both elders and deacons in every city as needed. There was organization.

When there were jobs to be done, they had to, you know, appoint some people to do those jobs. In 1 Corinthians 14, because there was so much disorder, Paul had to highly organize the meeting. He had to say, okay, only two or three speak in tongues in one meeting.

Only one at a time. Only if there's an interpreter. If there's not an interpreter, just be quiet.

And same thing with the prophets. Two or three at the most. And if one's talking and someone's standing by judging and sees there's something wrong with that and they speak up, then the prophet has to stop speaking and listen to the criticism.

And, you know, I mean, Paul has to lay it all. He says, let everything be done decently and in order. Now, see, where the Holy Spirit is governing, things are done decently and in order anyway.

God is not a god of confusion, Paul said. But when the Holy Spirit is being kind of ignored and flesh is getting in the way, then you've got to bring in rules. The law is not for the godly.

It's for the lawless, Paul said. And you bring in rules when you've got unruly people. But when people are walking in the Spirit, the fruit of the Spirit is self-control, love, joy, meekness, gentleness, and so forth, and you don't have these problems.

Where there is need, the apostles were willing to organize. But, unfortunately, modern Christians sometimes assume that since Paul organized this kind of service in Corinth that we must do exactly the same thing in all the churches today. I don't know.

Did Paul say so? I'm not aware of it. Paul gave the Corinthians instructions because they were out of hand. But the Spirit of God has to be caused a living organism to exist.

And it got organized to the extent and when it needed to be organized. But we don't know that the apostles ever intended for one form of organization to dominate the church in perpetuity. They might have, but we don't know that they did.

There's very little said about organizing in the Bible. A lot said about Christian ministry and Christian work, but very little about organization. And we do see that the occasions where organization is discussed, it is in response to a particular need that arose.

Well, I'm afraid I'm about out of time. I'm going to have to pick this up again next time. We're about halfway through this part.

But we will, I trust, next time I really do want to get into the apostolic fathers. I want to get beyond the time of the apostles into the apostolic fathers. Particularly, and it would be wrong to give this short script.

We need to spend plenty of time talking about the idea of apostolic succession because the Roman Catholic Church does believe that the apostles did not leave the church of the next generation without apostles. They believe that they appointed apostolic successors and those appointed successors and those appointed successors so that down to the present time in Rome, there is an apostolic successor with the same apostles authority. Protestants, of course, reject that claim, but we've got to examine that.

There's a Bible verse that the Catholics use to try to prove the point. We will examine that biblically and see whether that is so. But we'll just have to finish here for tonight.

There are many other things to discuss. I know it was a long list of points and probably wouldn't get through it. So we'll just pick it up again next time.

Are there any questions?