

Bible Basics Conference 2015: The church

Part 15

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[00:00:00] Before I start with the summary, I just want to mention one point. We are very thankful for this conference and that we've been able to have it in this way. Why am I saying this? Well, mainly because a few days ago we were not so sure. I think this year it was a particularly bumpy ride in the run-up to this conference and more than one person actually said to me, you know, I don't think the enemy wants us to have this conference. Now, be that as it may, I think I've been thinking about this a little bit and I think that there actually is a point there. If there is one thing that the enemy doesn't like on this earth, I think it's a testimony to Christ. And that is the subject of [00:01:04] this conference. It's, you know, the local aspect of the assembly, it's about the visible testimony to Christ on this earth. So I take some comfort from this, if it was a little bit of a bumpy ride. And so much more are we thankful that we did get to this point and had so many good things presented to us. Now, summary may be a big word. I'll just try and pick out sort of one or two points from each of the sessions. And hopefully it will help us to remind ourselves and to see how things fit together. We started off with the question, what actually is the church? And as always, or as often, we first have to unlearn a certain number of things that are sort of common thinking around us. Some [00:02:04] think of a building when they hear the word church or an organization. Some think it's just a denomination. Some think there was first a Jewish and then a Gentile church. And some actually think that Israel is the church or the church is Israel. There's a whole theological sort of line of thinking built around that misunderstanding. I think it was explained very ably by a brother. I think it was Mr. Kelly. He said, when the Bible speaks about Israel, it generally means Israel.

I think that was a very good and concise way of clarifying it. So what is the church? It is the [00:03:01] church of the living God. It is the church of Christ. He has said, I will build my church. It is the ecclesia, the called out. And the Bible uses different pictures, mainly three, but also some others to explain to us the notion of the church. And the first one is the body. And the body of Christ can be looked at in this global eternal aspect, the global aspect in time and the local aspect. It has to do with diversity and unity. The church is also the house of God, which has to do with order and God's glory. And the church is the bride, which has to do with affection. Now, what then is the local expression of the assembly? Well, first of all, the assembly in a place consists of all believers who live there. But it is given expression by those who gather together unto the Lord's name and have assembly meetings

as you find them in scripture. [00:04:06] I'll come to this in a minute. They meet on the basis of scriptural principles and they recognize the authority of Christ. And where that happens, you have an expression of the church of God. Now, having mentioned assembly meetings, there are three types of regular assembly meetings in the New Testament. And they are the meeting for edification. And Brother Simon emphasized, in particular, the need for this meeting where there is liberty for two or three prophets to speak and to give just the word needed for just that audience at just that point in time.

There's the meeting for the breaking of bread, which we'll come to in a little more detail in [00:05:03] a moment. And there is the meeting for prayer. Which one is most important? They're all important.

But they're all priority level number one. So basically, if it's at all possible for us, we should try and be there. It's to do with the Lord's presence. It's to do with coming to him. Now, these meetings, the assembly still has. And in having those, it's really something that's preserved from the time of Pentecost, what it has had since Pentecost. We can still meet around the Lord Jesus in the same way. So coming to the Lord's Supper, one of these three meetings, we saw that it's described in 1 Corinthians 11. It's a remembrance meal. And it's an opportunity [00:06:09] to show or to proclaim the death of the Lord to, as we heard, all intelligent creation.

I was intrigued when I saw on Rusty's slides that he quoted 2 Kings 5. In 2 Kings 5, you have the servants speaking to Naaman. This is when Naaman got really excited and angry. And he said, you know, how dare Elisha telling me to dive down, you know, to submerge myself into Jordan. And they said to him, if the prophet had bid thee some great thing, wouldest thou not have done it? How much rather than when he said this? And Naaman listened to them. He actually said, yeah, you've got a point there. What I've been asked is not so difficult. I could do it. And [00:07:01] I think he never regretted it. Now, I'm not saying that by breaking bread, you get saved. Don't get me wrong. I'm just saying that the principle applies. It's not a big thing the Lord has asked us to do. It's something that every believer who, you know, is old enough to understand it, should respond to and say, if the Lord asks me, then I want to do it. Second part of that presentation was about the collection. We saw that the collection is connected with the Lord's Supper. In Hebrews 13, you have the sacrifice of praise. And then in the next verse, verse 16, the matter of doing good and communicating. And again, it's called sacrifices, with which sacrifices God is well pleased. We also saw that both happen on the first day of the week. Acts 20, it was the breaking of bread on the first day of the week. And in 1 Corinthians 16, it's the collection on the first day of the week. And the principles are given there. It [00:08:05] was regular, individual, systematic, and proportionate. Not the only way of giving, but an important way of giving. As incidentally, we also see in Deuteronomy 12, the place that God has chosen and the sacrifices had to, you know, the tithes at the time had to be brought to the place of the Lord's presence. We then spoke about the Lord's table, which we find in 1 Corinthians 10. And again, it's not a physical table, but a table that speaks of fellowship. And we try to identify the features of this table. And we found that it said, we being many are one loaf. And that speaks of the unity of the body of Christ. We then found that the fellowship of the Lord's table and the fellowship with evil, the example there was demons, [00:09:07] but it's not the only example, or idols. Those two fellowships are incompatible. And the reason is, by partaking of the Lord's table, by partaking of the cup, we express fellowship with the blood of Christ. And that really separates us from the world and from evil. And thirdly, we saw it is his table. It's not the table of brother X or brother Y or of this group of Christians or that. It is the Lord's table. By way of illustration, coming back to the principle of our table at home, where we don't put the feet on the table when we eat. Imagine one day we had sort of six, seven, eight strong guys visiting us, and they just don't care. They just put their feet on the table. And

I look [00:10:08] at them, and I think, actually, they're a bit bigger than me. I'm not going to touch them. I ask them to stop, and they don't, and they just carry on. Now, what's going to happen? I think the point is going to come where I'm going to leave. I'm going to say, you know, this is no longer my table. If you carry on like this, it's your table. Again, that's an illustration. I think we can't ignore the authority of the Lord and at the same time claim that we are at his table and expressing subjection to his authority there. Now, we then spoke about gifts, and if you want to connect the gifts with an assembly meeting as well, you would probably think of the meeting for edification. It's not the only [00:11:07] way in which gifts are exercised, but some are exercised there. And we looked mainly at two chapters, Ephesians 4 and 1 Corinthians 12. And in Ephesians 4, the point is made that in order to receive those gifts, Christ had first to descend, to go into death, and then to ascend, and it is as ascended man that he gave the gifts. It is, so to speak, a present from the one who had to go into death in order to be able to give this. The list there is very short, and I'll come back to this in a moment. You've got five gifts, two are foundational, apostles and prophets, and through those, God has given or completed the New Testament. Now, once the New Testament was completed, that ministry was done. [00:12:04] You know, when you're building a house and you're just about to put the roof on, you don't want to fiddle with the foundation anymore. It's something that's done in the beginning, and so it was here, foundational gifts. The three other gifts, evangelists, shepherds, and teachers, remain until today. The evangelist bringing in believers, and it's interesting that the evangelist is also given to the assembly. It's not working in isolation. When people get converted, the evangelist wants to point them to where they can receive further help. Shepherds, we'll come back to in a moment, and teachers are those who explain the Word of God in such a way that we can follow, and our hearts are warmed for the truth. Now, drilling down a little bit into this, you know, one of those three gifts that [00:13:09] remain, pastoral care. We found that it's a big field of work. We found that historically, it's been a neglected field of work. Already in the Old Testament, God has to tell that the, well, God uses Ezekiel to speak to the leaders in Israel, and he says they have been shepherds. They should have cared for the flock, but they only tried to use the flock to enrich themselves, and they hadn't done all the things they should have been doing, and there's a very interesting list there of things involved in pastoral care. It's to do with seeking those who are wounded, those who are lame, those who have fallen behind, and to try and help. It's very much, not exclusively, but very much a personal [00:14:07] work, working with individuals, visiting, sometimes hospitality, sometimes looking at the picture bottom right, you know, putting your arms around someone. It's sometimes to do with giving food. It's often to do with applying the Word of God to their circumstances, and helping people along, and I think we've encouraged one another to try and have a watchful eye, and it says somewhere, can't put my finger on the verse now, but that we should have an eye on the well-being of the flock, and I think that's a good thing to remember. In 1 Corinthians 12, you have a much longer list of gifts than in Ephesians 4, and you might ask, why is that? Well, that is because it's a different [00:15:01] topic. In 1 Corinthians 12, the topic is spiritual things, spiritual manifestations, all the things the Spirit can do, and to show this, the Apostle gives a very long list, and he makes the contrast and says, you know, when you served idols, they were dumb, they were of stone, they didn't say anything, but now you're Christians, and you know spiritual manifestations, and they are so varied, and there you get this very long list of all the things the Spirit can do in believers. In Ephesians 4, the topic is quite different. The topic is the love of Christ for the Church, and it shows, A, that Christ gives everything the Church needs in order for the body to be edified until the end, and those gifts that are needed for that purpose, they will remain, the evangelists, the pastors, and the teachers. So it's no contradiction, it all fits into place, and that's why in 1 [00:16:04] Corinthians 12, you have the long list, the distinctions of gifts, services, and operations. Actually, 1 Corinthians 12 is part of a block of teaching, including the next two chapters.

Chapter 12 shows the principles of the gifts, teaching about the gifts. Chapter 13, it's very important, it shows the motive, and Paul says, if I exercise the greatest gift, and I don't have love, then it's worth nothing. And chapter 14 then shows the practice. It shows how this happens, you might say, in real life, in an assembly context, all should be understood, all should be for profit, all should be for edification and in order. Now, sisters, don't worry, it won't be [00:17:03] an extra hour now, but the topic came up in one or two questions, and we just want to re-emphasize and remind ourselves that when we talk about gifts, and some of those gifts are exercised by brothers, there is a very rich field of activity for sisters. And many things, probably most things, sisters are much better at than the brothers. I could give you some examples, my wife could probably give you a lot more examples. That's just a fact. Now, I know of sisters, even sisters who haven't got children and who are very, very busy in the assemblies, in a whole variety of work, and it ranges from just being available for cases of need, you might call it the gift of helps, [00:18:04] to literature work, to children's work, and the list could go on. And if you look at Romans 15, sorry, Romans 16, for example, you find greetings addressed to many individuals in Rome, and many of them are sisters. And you get an impression of the variety of work that sisters can do. So I just want us to be very clear on this. Now, I think teaching in the sense of teaching with authority the meaning of the Bible, I think that's not one of them. As we heard, when sisters teach, it's actually a different word in the original and in the new translation, it's admonish. They admonish the younger sisters. But that's just [00:19:01] one thing. There are lots of other things that sisters do and do very well. Now, young people. I think that there's another danger that we think, you know, gifts and being active in local assembly life, that's something for, you know, the, I don't know, 40 plus, 50 plus, 60 plus, a long way away from us young people. I don't think that's right either. And happily, I could tell you an equally long list of things that are done by young people. Locally, in Plumstead, the children's work is done by young people. If you remember some weeks ago, the wallpaper was coming down there, the back of the hall, and the wallpaper was coming down because the plaster was coming down and the plaster was coming down because the walls were humid. It's all fixed, looks very neat, [00:20:03] fantastic. Some young brothers have just been active. And, yeah, I don't want to keep you here till midnight, but there's a very long list of things that younger people do. And if they want to, they can make themselves very useful. Just one thing, one other thing for young brothers, you don't need any gift for prayer. And you don't need any gift for worship. The gift of prayer doesn't exist and the gift of worship does not exist. It's, you know, prayer is asking for something, either for yourself or for someone else, that's intercession. And worship is, you know, praising the Lord for who he is. And it doesn't have to be an elaborate, long prayer. It can be a very simple thing. It can be, you know, [00:21:05] unto him who loves us. And that's a response of the heart. So that's another encouragement for younger brothers.

Now, children. And it actually reminds me that I forgot a question. I forgot to answer a question yesterday, which was on my sheet, which was to do with should children put something into the collection box. I think Rusty said, if you want to upset the brethren, talk to them about money. I would say, if you want to really upset brethren, talk to them about their children. And I'm asked to talk about both. I'll try and be careful. Children have their place in the meeting. We saw yesterday that it is good if they observe. And by observing, they learn. They also pick things up. They don't just look. They also listen. And they pick things up. And when [00:22:01] you ask children after the meeting, what did you hear? You're sometimes surprised. They don't necessarily remember what you think they remember, but they remember something else. I think Nelly yesterday asked Sophia, you know, what was the conference about? And she said, oh, I know. It was about the invisible church. Well, she had picked something up. So, and often it's encouraging to see what they pick up and how they learn a little bit here, a little bit there. And that's good. Now, collection. I wouldn't want to be dogmatic on this in any way. I wouldn't ask a toddler to put something in who doesn't know what it means when

children get a little older and perhaps have some pocket money. And they say, you know, I want to give a little bit of that for the Lord, perhaps for the children in Africa or for some need. I'd be the last one to say, [00:23:07] look, you can't do this. So as a suggestion, if it is something that is done with understanding, I think it would be a good thing. Now that was just to pick up on those few points to do with sisters, young people, and children. But we then spoke about local charges and responsibilities. And the first one was elders or overseers, two words for the same group of people, one showing their dignity, one showing their task. And they were appointed by elders or their delegates, which today we have neither of, and therefore we can't appoint them. But the work still needs to be done. And the big challenge here is the list of qualifications in Titus 1 and 1 Timothy 3, which is really setting the bar very, very high. I [00:24:04] must say, if that was a job description, who would apply? Now, it's not just for any who want to serve in this way. I think those qualities are good qualities for all of us to aspire to. But the point is, the more somebody shows those qualities, the more he will have moral authority. As Paul says to Timothy, they shouldn't despise his youth, the others, but he says to Timothy, let no man despise thy youth. Well, how? Be an example. Be a model. That would give him moral authority. Deacons have more to do with the, not so much the oversight, but the practical work that needs to be done, which ranges from accounting to [00:25:03] building maintenance to all sorts of practical things that need to be done. And again, I just want to emphasize, not pointing fingers at anyone, but just trying to encourage there is scope to get involved. I just remember this little story of a preacher who was traveling somewhere to a country meeting. And it was a long day, and he traveled there, and he went to the meeting, and they had a collection, a collection box on the side somewhere, and the preacher put something in, and his little boy was with him, and he observed him. And at the end of the day, the meeting said, you know, we've had this visitor today, and we just want to show our appreciation, and we want to give him what we [00:26:04] had in the collection box today. And they gave him what was in the collection box, and it was just, it was exactly what he had put in. Now, his little son who was with him, he picked this up, and he said, Dad, how much did you put in? He said, well, so much. Well, Dad, how much did you get out? Well, so much. Well, the little boy thought about it, and he said, Dad, had you put in more, you would have got out more. Now, I'm not really saying this to make a point about the collection, but a point about assembly life. I think if we put in more, we get out more. It's, we put it in, you know, for the Lord, and for his people, but the more we do, I think the more we will be blessed. Now, unity and authority, or authority and unity. Mark presented to us three models. The first one is hierarchy or centralism. The second one is independence or autonomy. And the third one is unity. It's not an organization, it's an organism.

[00:27:21] Somebody once summarized these three options very neatly. He said, with centralism, you do as you're told. With independence, you do as you please. With unity, you have to seek the mind of the Lord.

Now, the first two are easy. Do as you're told, or do as you please. But for unity, that's Ephesians 4, verse 2 and 3. We need all these qualities of humility, and we need to endeavor to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. Yesterday, I forgot one point. Remember this question, what does it mean to meet on the ground of the body of Christ? And I said two things. I said, firstly, it means you see all believers in the bread, and secondly, you take part of the bread as a member of the body of Christ. [00:28:25] But there is a third thing, and this is what Mark was speaking about. It has to do with the meetings also acting in harmony. If you are in model two here, the first two conditions might be met. You might say, I'm a member of the body of Christ, I see all believers in the bread, but my meeting is autonomous. We don't care about any other meeting's authority. So that would still not be on the basis of the unity of the body of Christ. So I'd like to emphasize that we need to add that third condition. [00:29:07] So the local assembly has authority, acts locally, but it acts for and on behalf of

the whole Church of God. When those gathered to the name of the Lord Jesus have acted in discipline or reception, then the Church of God has acted. Decisions are recognized universally by other assemblies, but they can query if there is an issue and they don't understand why this decision has been taken. Important, the mutual recognition of assemblies and a walk in harmony guided by the head. Now we then looked at the topic of discipline, not specifically in the family, but discipline in the assembly, and we found that there were some important principles, important reasons behind discipline.

[00:30:06] It was for the maintenance of God's glory. It was also necessary for the assembly to clear itself, because especially when things become known publicly, it would reflect very badly on the assembly and therefore on the Lord if they were seen not to have any issue with what happened. It's also for the correction of the offender. I once went to a place very far away from here, and the president there wanted to tell me that somebody had been excluded, and they said, oh, he's been chased away. Now, I think there was a little bit of a misunderstanding. Putting out a fellowship is not a matter of chasing someone away. Even that final step of discipline is done for his restoration, for the profit and restoration of souls.

[00:31:08] Now, I have to refer you back to the slides. I won't go through all the different levels now.

The point is, we looked at different types of offenses. Some was the brother overtaken by a fault.

Another case is a personal transgression, brother A against brother B. Another case is false doctrine.

And, you know, as in medicine, you don't treat every illness with the same medicine. So in discipline, it depends on the case what approach is the right one.

And then we finished on a very bright note, the matter of hope. The hope of the church, a well-defined hope. [00:32:03] Not a vague feeling or wishful thinking, but a hope that is certain.

And we found that it is a hope that is not linked with this earth. It is the church has a heavenly origin, a heavenly calling, and a heavenly hope.

And we found that there are two sets of scriptures talking about the Lord's coming. One that has to do with the rapture and with grace, and one that has to do with the appearing and responsibility, and those are two separate events, separated by the tribulation period of seven years. And we are privileged to know that we won't go through that period. We are waiting for the rapture, which can occur at any point in time.

But in addition, we are looking forward to the appearing as well. [00:33:05] As Paul says, those who love his appearing will be a great day for us.

But I think mainly we look forward to it because it's the day when Christ will be vindicated on this earth, where he was rejected, he will be recognized. Perhaps we can close with a hymn, or I just suggest one. I don't know, perhaps others will be suggested. Number 449.