

What and Who

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[0 : 00] Please take out your Bible and turn on over to the book of Matthew. Today we are going to take a look at how a church should function according to the Bible.

How we believe a church should function according to the Bible. And the reason why we would take the time to do this now is because in about a month we're going to have the privilege of joining together as members of Steadfast Church.

And so I want to talk a little bit and give some teaching on what that means and what that would look like. Not so much the process of becoming a member, that feels mildly less important today, what the process would actually look like, whether we sign a covenant or something like that. But rather, what is the work and the function that would go into being a member of a healthy church. So we are going to be in Matthew 16 is where we are going to start.

Before we get to that, one brief pastoral encouragement, if I could offer it.

[1 : 21] During midweek discussion this week, Ryan had written and asked a question for us. And the question was this, what can help lift your eyes from your suffering and onto the Lord's steadfast love?

And I was thinking about that on Wednesday when we were having the discussion. And I think I may have even contributed an answer. And then on Thursday, I was continuing to reflect on that question.

And I thought about this. If you want to convince someone that God is patient, Do you know what you should do?

You can't just tell them God is patient. They already probably know that. You need to show them that God is patient.

You need to be patient with them. Do you want to convince someone that God's faithfulness is great? Then you be faithful to them.

[2 : 34] Even when it seems like maybe it would be easier and less costly to move away from them. Do you want to convince someone that God has steadfast love for them?

Then you show them steadfast love. We can say all day to one another, God has steadfast love for you. Yes, I believe that.

And then do you know what I need? I need someone to show me that. And I think you do too. We need to show one another that kind of love that doesn't walk out and doesn't walk away.

You want to convince someone that God has new mercies? We can come up with all kind of clever ways of saying that his mercies are new. They auto-renew. They're like a fountain.

They're like a geyser. Whatever illustration you want to use. We know that in our heads. But if we really want to convince someone that that's true, we need to show them that God's mercies are new by being merciful again and again and again with them.

[3 : 45] Are you following with me on that? Okay. You can clip that off of the recording later. That was just a freebie. Let's pray. Father, thank you for your great kindness to us.

Thank you for the privilege of being together. Thank you for the opportunity to sing these songs that stir our hearts and remind us of your great love and the complete atonement that Jesus has made for us.

That Jesus is the word. And that even if we were to lose everything else, having Jesus, we have it all.

Thank you for this reminder that the devil, our great adversary, has already lost. Thank you for the reminder that our great high priest is at your right hand, Father, interceding for us.

And indeed, we can testify and say together, there are 10,000 reasons for our soul, for my soul to bless the Lord.

[5 : 01] And even when I finish those 10,000, I will have 10,000 more. You are so kind and so good. Please help us now as we turn our attention to your word, to listen, to consider, to believe, and to obey.

Draw our attention again and again to our Savior, Jesus, we ask. It is in his name that we pray. Amen. The most dominant metaphor for men and women in the New Testament is brother and sister.

If you are a Christian, then because of the saving work of the Lord Jesus Christ and because of the life-giving ministry of the Holy Spirit, God has brought you into his family.

We are brothers and sisters. But not only that, according to the book of 1 Peter, as Peter writes to scattered Christians, we are a flock.

We are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people. Notice Peter's metaphors. Not a priest, but a priesthood.

[6 : 36] Not a sheep, but a flock. Not a person, but a people. You cannot obey the one another scattered throughout the New Testament in isolation.

Love one another, forgive one another, encourage one another, submit to one another. These are impossible to obey unless you are with other Christians.

Christians. But being with other Christians can be what? Painful. I had hard in the first draft and then I changed it to painful.

Being with other Christians can be painful. Some of us have been hurt by the church. Some of us have been abused by church leaders, pastors, elders, priests, youth ministry leaders, Sunday school teachers.

Listen, if church hurt is part of your story, I am sorry. Sorry. We grieve with you.

[7 : 57] But more importantly, Jesus grieves with you. Jesus knows your pain. He was rejected by those who should have loved him.

He was mistreated by those who should have honored him. He was abandoned by those who should have protected him.

He was betrayed by those who should have stood with him. Your wounds from the church matter to Jesus.

And by his wounds, you are healed. Because you matter to Jesus.

We are being healed by God's grace and the Spirit's power. But listen, we are not whole yet, are we? We are not whole yet.

[9 : 02] There is more healing that is yet to come for us. So it's okay to feel a little uncomfortable talking about how a church should function.

And that's especially true if you have seen a church dysfunction. And as you continue to heal, I want to invite you to this.

I want to invite you to cultivate a meaningful commitment to a community of believers. When we consider how a church functions, Christians should at least agree with these two statements.

The Lord Jesus Christ is the head of the church. Ephesians chapter 5, verse 23. And secondly, Jesus mediates that authority through his word and through the Holy Spirit.

Faithful Christians ought to agree to these two statements. But what does this look like practically? How does Jesus mediate his authority through the word and through the Spirit?

[10 : 22] What does that look like practically? Well, there is no little disagreement about this. Some churches believe that Jesus gives authority to a lead pastor or a senior pastor.

And that person basically unilaterally makes all the decisions for the church. Some churches believe that there ought to be a team of elders.

Some church denominations will group their elders into different classes, ruling elders and teaching elders. And they've found ways for the church to function with these groups of elders relating to each other and either giving oversight or teaching.

Some churches believe that there ought to be a church council or maybe a deacon board. And that tends to function as the ruling body of the church. Some groups believe that there ought to be a bishop or a presbytery, which is such a hard word to say.

I don't know why. But a bishop or a presbytery, see, who has authority over multiple churches. I suspect that this diversity in church practice is due to this fact.

[11 : 51] If we want to know how a church ought to function, we can't turn to one single passage in scripture. Wouldn't that be convenient? That would solve so many issues.

So much disagreement. Here's what happens. Because we can't turn to one single scripture, then different groups of Christians will choose to emphasize one or another particular portions of scripture.

And as a result, their church function, their church council, their elders, their pastor will look and function differently. This is why it is crucial, crucial, steadfast church, that we have humility to learn and wisdom to discern and grace to disagree on secondary matters like this.

Since we don't have a single portion of scripture that we can turn to, let's look briefly at several portions of scripture. In the first draft, I had the actual number, but I was afraid that that would feel intimidating to the children.

So we're just going to look at several portions of scripture and we're going to try to answer this question, how does Jesus mediate his authority that he gives through the scripture and the Holy Spirit?

[13 : 20] But before we answer that question, how does Jesus mediate his authority? Let's answer this question, what is the authority that Jesus gives? And we find the answer to this in Matthew 16.

And Emily, would you please come and serve us? Matthew chapter 16, Emily is going to read 13 through 19. Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, who do people say that the Son of Man is?

And they said, some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets. He said to them, but who do you say that I am? Simon Peter replied, you are the Christ, the Son of the living God.

And Jesus answered him, blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. Peter gives the right answer to Jesus' question.

[14 : 36] Jesus asks his disciples, who do people say that I am? What are the crowds saying about me? What do they believe about me? Now Jesus already knew the answer.

Jesus did not need words of affirmation, like I do. Jesus here is not looking for words of affirmation from the disciples. He knows precisely what the crowds think about him, and we read about that in the Gospel of John, don't we?

He tells us, John tells us, that Jesus knows what people are thinking about him. This is a teachable moment for the disciples. That's why Jesus asks.

And Peter gives the right answer. Peter understands what is true about Jesus. Look again, Matthew 16 and verse 13.

When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, who do people say that the Son of Man is? And they replied, some say John the Baptist, others Elijah, still others Jeremiah, or one of the prophets.

[15 : 49] But you, he asked them, who do you say that I am? Simon Peter answered, you are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.

And Jesus responds to him. Peter gives the right answer. He understands, listen, what is true about Jesus? Peter understands that Jesus is the Messiah, the Christ, the anointed one, the one sent from God.

He understands that Jesus is the Son of the living God. Peter understands what is true about Jesus.

Notice how Jesus responds to Peter. Verse 17, Jesus responded, blessed are you, Simon, son of Jonah, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but my Father in heaven.

And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church and the gates of Hades will not overpower it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven and whatever you bind on earth will have been bound in heaven and whatever you loose on earth will have been loosed in heaven.

[17 : 09] Jesus blesses Peter, not because Peter figures this out. Peter tells, Jesus tells Peter, you didn't figure this out.

My Father revealed this to you. But nevertheless, you are blessed. Why? Because Peter, you are one, hear it, who makes a right confession about what is true of me.

you are one who makes a right confession about what is true about me. And because of his confession, Jesus gives Peter the keys to the kingdom of heaven.

So what authority does Jesus give Peter? what do you use keys for? Opening things, opening doors, unlocking doors, locking doors, that's what you use keys for.

So Jesus gives Peter, who represents the apostles, decision-making authority in matters related to the teachings and practices of the faith.

[18 : 29] In other words, the authority to define what is a true confession about Jesus and who is holding that confession faithfully.

So the answer to the question, how does Jesus mediate his authority is Peter. And some churches do believe this, that Jesus' authority passed to Peter and down through all of his successors.

But wait, there's more. not so fast. If we turn forward just two chapters, it may be one page in your Bible.

To chapter 18, Jesus gives this same authority again. Look at verse number 18. Chapter 18 and verse number 18.

Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will have been bound in heaven and whatever you loose will have been loosed in heaven.

[19 : 41] Jesus gives the same authority again. Do you see that? Who is he giving it to? Well, we should look for some context here. Back up to verse number 15.

If your brother sins against you, go tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have won your brother. But if he won't listen, take one or two others with you so that by the testimony of two or three witnesses, every fact may be established.

If he doesn't pay attention to them, to this group of witnesses, tell the church. The church.

If he doesn't pay attention even to the church, let him be like a Gentile and a tax collector to you.

Truly, I tell you, whatever you bind on earth, who's the you here?

The church. The church that Jesus says you're supposed to tell. Whatever you bind on earth will have been bound in heaven and whatever you loose on earth will have been loosed in heaven.

[20 : 57] Again, I truly, I tell you, if two of you agree, if two of you on earth agree about any matter that you pray for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven for where two or three are gathered together in my name, I am there among them.

Now, the context for this beautiful sentence at the end of verse 20 is not a prayer meeting. It's okay that we apply this to the prayer meeting. That's not the context here.

Jesus has in mind a meeting related to discipline. Discipline by the church. Why?

Because there is someone who is no longer holding a faithful confession of what is true about Jesus. or someone who is not acting who is someone who holds that confession faithfully.

Do you see the what and the who? Jesus extends it to Peter and the apostles and then Jesus, two chapters later, broadens that out and says, not just for Peter and his successors, for the church.

[22 : 16] You tell it to the church and the church needs to make a determination. What is a faithful confession about me and who is holding that confession faithfully?

As we continue to worship as steadfast church, this means that the church ought to be involved in any decision to adjust our statement of faith.

faith. Why? Because it is what we believe. The church should be involved in that conversation and the church should be involved when we are talking about who is holding that confession faithfully.

In other words, the church should be involved when we add members and when a member needs to be removed because of sin or a failure to hold to the confession that we believe.

Jesus mediates his authority through the scripture and the Holy Spirit. How? By giving authority to the church.

[23 : 36] church. Let's look at Galatians 1 and see this in practice. Galatians 1, if you can't get there, it'll be on the screen.

Galatians chapter 1, Paul, an apostle, not from men or by man, but by Jesus Christ and God the Father who raised him from the dead and all the brothers who are with me, what's next?

To the churches of Galatia. Paul is writing not to elders, not to the men, he is writing to the churches. Notice that as you read through your New Testament.

Who are the New Testament letters largely addressed to? To the churches. To the churches of Galatia.

verse number six. Paul says, I am amazed that you are so quickly turning away from him who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel.

[24 : 55] A different gospel. You are losing what you ought to be believing. You are losing the what?

It is a different gospel. Verse seven. Not that there is another gospel, but there are some who are troubling you and they want to distort the gospel of Christ.

Notice what Paul says in verse eight. Do you see what Paul says?

Look, if someone shows up to your worship gathering and you think, I think that's an angel. We should let the angel preach. preach and you let the angel preach and the angel preaches a different gospel than what we have been taught, then we should remove the angel from preaching.

And Paul takes it a step further and says, if me, if I show up or one of the men with me, the apostle Paul who learned this from Jesus himself, if I show up and I preach to you a gospel different from the gospel I already preach to you because I have lost my mind, then you drag me out of that pulpit.

[26 : 27] Don't listen to someone who is preaching you a different what. You need to evaluate that who and decide that they ought not to be serving you anymore.

Do you see how this works out in practice in this church? Paul doesn't entrust this not even only to the elders of the church, he directs it to the church broadly.

Now that's not to say that a group of elders would not help a church to discern and to diagnose and to be careful and mindful and maybe even the elders would be the first to be sensitive to a false gospel, but maybe not.

Maybe not. Maybe the elders like Paul have lost their mind. Jesus mediates his authority to the church.

The church in Galatia needs to be the church. It needs to exercise the authority that Jesus gave to her. It needs to define what is a faithful confession about Jesus and who is holding that confession faithfully.

[27 : 46] God Maybe you're thinking, you know, I don't mind holding the key to my own house.

I don't mind having a key to the office. I might not even mind having a key to a friend's house or knowing where the secret key is stashed at someone's house in case there's an emergency.

I don't mind that you all, many of you, know the code to get in my garage. You probably don't mind knowing that, right? But I don't know how I feel about holding the keys to the kingdom of heaven.

Feels a little intimidating? Feel a little inadequate for this job? Me too. Here's good news for us from Ephesians chapter 4.

Ephesians chapter 4. And verse number 10. The one who descended, Jesus, is also the one who ascended far above all the heavens to fill all things.

[28 : 59] And he, Jesus, he himself, gave some to be apostles. Some prophets. Some evangelists. Some pastors and teachers.

Why? To equip the saints for the work of ministry. To build up the body of Christ. Until what?

Until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of God's Son. Growing into maturity with the stature measured by Christ's fullness.

The one who descended has also ascended. And having ascended. And having ascended, he gives gifts to the church.

Apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers. To do the church's work? No, no, no, no, no, no.

[29 : 58] Not to do the church's work. To equip the church to do the work of ministry. That's the job of this group of people.

These gifts that God, Jesus, gives to the church. Not to do the work of ministry. But to equip, to prepare, to teach the church.

To do the work of ministry. To unify the church around what is true about Jesus.

And to build up the church. So that we are mature and consistent in our obedience to Jesus. Not only so that we know the what.

But so that we are good who's of this confession. Of what it means to follow Jesus. In addition to these good gifts that Jesus gives the church here in Ephesians.

[31 : 08] Jesus also gives the church elders. Elders, according to scripture, are faithful men who serve by shepherding and overseeing the church.

And elders cannot make the church obey. Why? Because Jesus gives his authority, not to the elders, but to the church.

[37 : 44] The church does not belong to the elders or a bishop or a pastor. The church belongs to Jesus. Paul says this in Acts chapter 20.

He purchased it. He purchased the church with his own blood. The church belongs to Jesus.

Once we were not a people. But now we are God's people. Not my people.

God's people. Are these words true of you? Are you part of Jesus's church?

Are you one of God's children by grace through faith? Have you trusted in Jesus for the salvation of your eternal soul?

[38 : 49] Or are you still on the outside, sort of peering over into the sheepfold? You know?

Hanging around with the sheep.

I'm so glad that you're hanging around with the sheep. But hear me. If you know what is true about Jesus, if you know the gospel, what is true, then what is stopping you from saying, I believe that gospel.

I want to be one who is holding that confession of faith faithfully. follower of Jesus.

Will you cultivate a meaningful commitment to a community of believers? I say meaningful because it is tempting to treat our commitment to the church like a commitment to exercise.

You know? It can become very haphazard. It can feel sort of occasional. I exercise when it fits in with the rest of my schedule.

[40 : 08] That's not a meaningful commitment to exercise. And that is not a meaningful commitment to a community of believers. I say meaningful because we can also treat our commitment to the church like a commitment to Sam's Club or Costco.

What am I going to get out of this? What are the benefits that I will get by being part of Sam's Club or Costco?

That may be a meaningful question for your commitment to Sam's or Costco, but that does not represent a meaningful commitment to the church. follower of Jesus.

Will you cultivate a meaningful commitment to a community of believers? Will you grow together in unity and maturity?

Because Jesus says that matters. You cannot obey the one another's unless you are spending time with other Christians.

[41 : 17] In order to stay faithful to Jesus, you need other godly Christians in your life, and so do I. We are not merely sheep.

We are a flock. We are not just priests. We are a priesthood. We are not only individuals who have been saved by grace alone, through faith alone.

We are a people, the people of God, brothers and sisters, a body unified under our head who is Christ.

Jesus gives his authority, not to me, and not to you alone, not even to the elders. Jesus gives his authority to the church.

The church is responsible for knowing what is a faithful confession about Jesus and who is holding that confession faithfully.

[42 : 19] cultivate a meaningful commitment to a community of believers because Jesus will build his church and the gates of hell will not prevail against her.

Let's pray. Father, we are grateful for your kindness. we are grateful for your word.

Please give us humility and wisdom and grace as we consider these various passages of scripture, as we assess and evaluate whether they have been interpreted and applied rightly.

Give us humility and wisdom and grace. would you please guide each of your people here as they consider what it would look like to make a meaningful commitment to this community of believers.

Thank you for the healing that you have already given and for the healing that you will continue to give. And thank you, Lord Jesus, for your beautiful promise grace that you will build your church and that the gates of hell will not prevail against her.

[43 : 54] Give us courage as we go back out into the world, into our places of influence, into our places of non-influence, into restaurants and coffee shops and bookstores where we find ourselves.

Give us courage to preach this gospel and give us grace to persevere in faith, holding fast to this confession about Jesus.

We ask all of this in his name, giving thanks. Amen.