

Established Churches

by Chuck Smith

The sermon emphasizes the importance of establishing churches and helping believers grow in their faith, rather than trying to build a large church through gimmicks and programs.

Duration: 39:24

Scripture: Acts 2:42, Acts 2:47, Jude 1:20

Topics: "Church"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker encourages the congregation to come forward for prayer and reflection before leaving. He emphasizes the importance of keeping oneself in the love of God by addressing any bitterness, strife, or evil speaking in one's heart. The speaker also mentions the instructions given in a letter to abstain from idol pollution, fornication, and consuming certain types of meat and blood. He then discusses the purpose of the church and how it is God's task to build and add to it, rather than relying on human efforts or gimmicks. The speaker concludes by emphasizing the need for the church to fulfill its calling by feeding and caring for God's people, which will result in the Lord adding to the church.

Transcript

Let's turn to Acts 16. Paul and Barnabas have had some problems. Problems over John Mark, the nephew of Barnabas, who had deserted them on their first missionary journey.

And now that they're ready to take off again, Barnabas wants to try John Mark once more. Paul refuses to do so, and so they decide to split up. Barnabas took John Mark, headed for Cyprus, and Silas, who was from the church in Jerusalem, went with Paul to visit the churches that they had established on their first missionary journey.

And so in chapter 16, Paul and Silas arrive in Derbe and Lystra. Lystra is that place, you remember, where the lame man was healed, and the people thought the gods had come down, and the priest was ready to offer a sacrifice to Paul and Barnabas, but they stopped them and told them that they had come to tell them about the true and the living God. And then the people turned against Paul, they stoned him, they drug him out of the city, thought he was dead, and so they have now come back to Derbe and Lystra.

Now this is about five years later. Paul established the church there in Lystra about five years prior to this second missionary journey, and so when they got there, they discovered the church was doing well. There was a young man in the church named Timothy, who was a outstanding young man.

Paul calls him his son in the faith. He said that there was no one that was as close to his own thinking as far as his care for the people, his primary concern for the people, in Philippians chapter 2, as Paul wrote to them, he said, I trust in the Lord to send Timothy shortly to you, that I also may be of good comfort when I know your state. For I have no man like-minded who will naturally care for your state.

For all seek their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ. But you know the proof of him, that as a son with a father, he has served with me in the gospel. And so Timothy had served with Paul.

He actually, Paul met him probably the first time that Paul was there. Timothy was a teenager. Now five years have gone by.

He's probably in his early 20s. And so Timothy became then a traveler with Paul, a companion and a part of the missionary team, to be a helper to Paul from this point on. Paul had written to Timothy not to let any man despise his youth.

In another place, Paul told Timothy to flee youthful lust. And it's always exciting to find young men that you recognize their potential and you see them fully committed to the things of the Lord. Young men in their early 20s or young men in their teens.

And you see the commitment that they have to the Lord. It's always an exciting thing. It's an exciting thing to take these young men under your wing and to more or less tutor them and to watch them develop.

And it's just a, it's a thrill. I think of our own Greg Laurie, who was, just came fresh out of high school. In fact, he came in high school and as soon as he graduated, started hanging around the church.

I think of Mike McIntosh and Jeff Johnson and Don McClure and Skip Heisick and Raul Reese and Ricky up in Santa Barbara, Joe Foch and Bill Gallatin, Steve Mays, and our own son, Chuck Jr., and our son Jeff, and our son-in-law Brian. And I could go on listing hundreds of young men that came in, in their early years and made their commitment to the Lord. And you recognize that there was a genuineness to their commitment and to bring them on and intern and see them develop and go out into the ministry.

Now concerning Timothy, he was that kind of a young man. And we are told that his mother was a Jewess. His father was a Greek, but his mother was a believer.

Paul, in his second letter to Timothy, said that he was filled with joy when he remembered the unfeigned faith that Timothy had, which was first in his grandmother, Lois, and in his mother, Eunice, and was also in him. And so he had a grandmother who was a real believer. His mother was a believer.

And this faith, this knowledge of God and trust in God was passed on down to Timothy. And that's always great when you have that kind of a godly heritage that is passed on to you. He must have been, Timothy must have been an exemplary young man, because we read that the brethren there spoke highly of him.

So he was already just as a young man recognized by those in the church, as a young man with a true commitment to the Lord. It's interesting that later on, Paul wrote to Timothy, encouraging him to be an example to the believer in word, in his manner of living, in his love, in spirit, in his faithfulness, and in purity. Paul wanted to take Timothy with him as he continued the missionary journey, and possibly as a replacement for John Mark.

It would seem that the young men served well, they have a lot of energy, and so they make good gopher kind of fellows. When you need someone to, you know, go for you, to carry a letter for you, or to do some of that type of work, just sort of a handy servant to have around. One who is committed to the work that you're doing, and one who is anxious to just serve the Lord in whatever capacity it is.

And that's really the, you know, there are a lot of people who would like to serve the Lord in just waiting to take over Billy Graham's ministry. And you know, you want to serve the Lord in great spectacular ways, and all, but to just serve him wherever he calls, wherever he opens the door, wherever the opportunity might arise. And doing different things, it doesn't have to be in the pulpit, it's just the idea of whatever I'm doing in word or deed, do it all for the glory of God.

And you just feel that great excitement of, I have a chance to serve the Lord. And it's thrilling to have this kind of an attitude. I think of how many fellows that come and volunteer when we are working at Twin Peaks or on the other facilities, who just love to serve the Lord.

Pounding nails or whatever, it's just as unto the Lord. And knowing that of the Lord, they're going to receive their reward. So, because his father was a Greek, but his mother was Jewish, Paul had Timothy circumcised.

Now, it was only for the sake of the Jews, it wasn't for some spiritual value that it might give to him. But it was just to silence critics, because they knew that his mother was a Jew. And so, for him to work in the ministry, it was an important thing, just to silence critics.

No real spiritual significance at all. Paul had won a great victory there in the council in Jerusalem, when it was decided that the Gentiles did not have to be circumcised or keep the law of Moses. And yet now, here with Timothy, Paul has him circumcised.

And so, it's one of those places where Paul said, I've become all things to all men, that I might gain the more. It's just so that I won't be an offense. I mean, I know that it is, means nothing, as far as my relationship with God is concerned, as far as my own personal spiritual experience is concerned, it means absolutely nothing.

But if it can quiet some of the objections that people might raise, then it's one of those things, it's better to just go along and have him do it than to... There are enough problems that come with the ministry, and there's enough things to criticize that you don't need to have something else. And so, it's just one of those things, as Paul said, live peaceably with all men as much as lieth in you. Here, Paul is practicing what he preached.

It's just in order that they might live peaceably. Paul knew that the true circumcision was of the heart, not of the flesh. And there's just no sense of raising a controversy because you hold to a position which really has no eternal consequence at all.

It's not one of those big major issues, it's just a minor thing, but it can quiet a lot of criticism. And it can stop a lot of debate. And it will enhance or enable Timothy to minister better to the Jews.

It's sort of the same kind of a position that I've taken concerning Christmas trees. I have great liberty in Jesus Christ. And I have the kind of liberty that I could enjoy a Christmas tree in the home.

I love the smell of the pine, and it's just great for the season. And when the children were young, we had Christmas trees. But then there were people that began to say, well, that's a part of the pagan portion of the celebration.

And some of the people were beginning to be stumbled. And so, rather than, it's a big issue. I mean, uh, so I haven't had a tree for many years, but I could, uh, in my own heart.

I mean, I wouldn't feel condemned saying, oh, you know, bringing a pagan symbol in the house. Oh, terrible, terrible. Uh, no, it doesn't bother me at all.

I have great liberty in Christ. And, uh, it, but yet just for the sake of, of not, uh, creating a stumbling block or not having an issue for people to debate over or whatever, um, just, you know, it's not that big of a deal. Now, in contrast, Paul had another protegee.

His name was Titus. He also was a young man. And Titus was a Gentile.

He was in the same category as Timothy, one that Paul was sort of tutoring and, uh, guiding in the ministry. And Paul did not have Titus circumcised because everybody knew he was a Gentile. And so, it wasn't an important thing as far as Titus was concerned.

So, Paul writing of, of the, uh, trip to Jerusalem where this whole issue was settled concerning the Gentiles and circumcision and all, uh, in Galatians chapter two, Paul is writing to them about this particular trip to Jerusalem where this council was heard, uh, where the council heard this issue. Then 14 years afterwards, he said, I went up to Jerusalem with Barnabas and we took Titus with us also. And I went up by revelation and I communicated unto them the gospel which I preach among the Gentiles, but privately to them which were of reputation, lest by any means I should run or had run in vain.

But neither Titus, who was with me being a Greek, was compelled to be circumcised. So, he talks about, you know, Titus then, but they didn't require him to be circumcised. Writing to the Galatians again in the fifth chapter, he sort of gives them his own perspective on the subject of circumcision.

He said, stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ has made us free. Don't be entangled again with the yoke of bondage. Behold, I, Paul, say unto you that if you be circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing.

That is, if you're circumcised thinking that it's going to make you more spiritual or it's going to put you on a spiritual level above others, he said then, Christ is of no profit to you. For I testify again to every man that is circumcised, that is for the purpose of being righteous, that then you become a debtor to do the whole law. For in Christ Jesus, neither circumcision avails anything nor uncircumcision, but it is the faith that works by love.

That's the main thing. The faith that works by love. So, as they now move on from Lystra and Derby, Timothy with them, going to the other churches in the various cities, Paul was carrying with him the letter or at least a copy of the letter from the church in Jerusalem, in which the church outlined the portions of the law that they felt that the Gentile believers should adhere to.

And so, it seems like wherever Paul went, there were always those people they called Judaizers. And a Judaizer was a person who was insisting that faith in Jesus Christ is not sufficient. You need also to live by the law and to keep the law.

And so, these Judaizers would follow Paul. And they would come in where Paul would go into a city, hold his campaigns. There would be many people that would come to Jesus Christ.

And so, as Paul would leave, they'd move in. And they'd say, now, Paul is just not quite right. He says he's an apostle, but he's really not.

He's not really recognized by those in Jerusalem. They don't think too highly of him and all. And you really need to keep the law.

Paul's wrong in just saying that you just have to believe in Christ and you have this wonderful liberty in the Lord. Paul's wrong. And you really need to keep the law and all.

And they would follow Paul. It's interesting. There are always, it seems, those groups who really don't do evangelism among the lost in the world.

They try to do their evangelism in the church. They try to persuade people within the church to their particular persuasion. I was reading that 98%, I believe it is, of those in Seventh-Day Adventism come from other denominations.

They really don't have that much of a ministry to the world, to the lost. But they like to get hold of people, as do the Jehovah Witnesses. And just to bring up their points that they sort of emphasize and convert you to their position.

Before we had our security patrols in the parking lot, and basically they're there so that your stereo is still in your car when you get back out. We were having a lot of stereos missing and so forth. So we've hired the fellows to do the security patrol.

And they volunteer and some are paid. But they're out there to just watch the parking lot and to make sure that things are secure. Before they were there, quite often when a person would go out to their car, they would find some kind of a flyer under the windshield wiper.

And some church would send the people down here to put the flyers advertising their church or their services or some special meetings or whatever that they're having at their church. So Romaine would always get hold of the pastor and say, you know, when we have special meetings at Calvary, we don't send our people over to your parking lot to put flyers on the cars. They go down to the beaches or to the public places and all.

We're wanting to win the world. We're not wanting to win your people. We trust that they're already converted.

And why would you send them to our church, you know, to our parking lot? So, but that happened many, many times. But it, it does seem like there are those, like those that were following Paul. Rather than just going out and, and, and winning converts from the world, they were trying to win converts from those that had already become converted, those that already believed.

And they, they look at a large church as a, as a great target, you know, for adding to their church. It's, well, I don't have too much respect for them. Now, these churches were so far away from the church in Jerusalem, that these fellas could come in and say, well, now the church in Jerusalem, you know, they agree with us, and Paul's a renegade and so forth.

So Paul carried this letter with him, so that as he would win people to the Lord and establish them firmly in their faith in Jesus Christ, he could then show them, this letter is an official letter from the church council in Jerusalem, in which they acknowledge that it isn't necessary to keep the law of Moses or to be circumcised in order to be saved. And so this letter declares that you should abstain from the pollution of idols, from fornication, and don't eat meat that has been strangled, and don't eat or drink blood. And so we read that the churches, five years later, still going on, Paul now establishes them in the faith, and they increased in number daily.

I believe that it is the Lord's will and the Lord's desire to bless his church and to add to his church. But I believe that that is the Lord's task. Jesus said, when Peter made the confession that you are the Messiah, the Son of the living God, he said, this rock, I will build my church.

I will build my church, he said, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. For years, working within a denominational structure, we were always trying to build the church, never very successful at it. All types of contest, all types of programs to entice people to come to church.

I mean, the ideas that they have of getting people in are amazing. The things that they can dream up, gimmicks to get people to come to church. Going outside of the city, taking gas-filled balloons, putting inside of the balloon a number and a little note.

Next Sunday morning, there will be a drawing at the church. Bring this number, and if your number is drawn, you will win a free bicycle, you know. And you, you know, test the wind direction, and hopefully you're going to the right.

When they take off, they go the right direction toward the city, but you figure how much gas, you know, so the balloon will settle down on the city, and, and so hopefully kids will see the balloon coming down, and they'll see the note in it, and they'll bring their number to Sunday school next Sunday and try and win the bike, you know. I mean, all kinds of things, trying to build the church. I am convinced that when the church becomes what God wants the church to be, then the Lord will do what He desires to do for the church, and that's to add to the church.

And so, here are the churches, they're flourishing, they, they're growing daily. Going back to the second chapter of the book of Acts, when after the day of Pentecost, we read, and they continued steadfastly in the Apostles' doctrine, in the fellowship, in the breaking of bread and prayer. These were the four things the church was doing.

Studying the Word of God, Apostles' doctrine, gathering together in fellowship, the oneness communion of the body of Christ, partaking of the Lord's Supper together, which was a visible demonstration of the bond and tie that exists within the body of Christ. And then in prayer. And down at the end of the second chapter, we read the results, and the Lord added daily to the church such as should be saved.

You see, the church was all that the Lord wanted the church to be, and thus the Lord was doing what He desired to do for the church, adding daily those that should be saved. And that's His business. The adding to the church is His business.

And yet, it would seem that we spent most of our time trying to do His business, and weren't really doing what we ought to be doing. So when we finally just started doing what God wanted us to do, as He said to Peter, do you love me? Feed my sheep, take care of my sheep, tend the flock. And we just started feeding

the sheep, doing what the Lord had called us to do.

Then the Lord started doing what He said He would do, adding to the church daily such as should be saved. Jude exhorted the people to keep yourself in the love of God. By this I understand that Jude is saying that it's possible, God loves you.

And he's not saying be so sweet, kind, nice, friendly, and generous that God can't help but love you. He is just saying keep yourself in the place where God can manifest His love to you. God does love you.

He wants to manifest that love. Keep yourself in the place where He can manifest His love to you in full consistency with His nature of holiness, purity. Keep yourself in the place of blessing.

God can bless as He desires your life. There are things, if allowed, can hinder the work of the Holy Spirit within the church. We are commanded to grieve not the Holy Spirit of God.

We're instructed not to quench the Spirit. What are things that grieve and quench the Spirit? Well, Paul said to the Ephesians, let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, evil speaking be put away from you with all malice. These are things that quench the Spirit.

These are things that grieve the Holy Spirit. If you're filled with bitterness, with wrath, with anger, or you're clamoring, or you're speaking evil of others, or you have malice in your heart, it will choke off the blessings of God from your life. And if these things are allowed to exist within the church, they will choke off the blessings of God from the church.

To the Colossians, Paul said, but now put off all these things, anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication out of your mouth. So in keeping yourself in the love of God, not doing the things that grieve or quench the Holy Spirit. What is the environment in which the Lord works? It's the environment of love, the fruit of the Spirit is love, and that's the environment in which the Spirit works.

In fact, Jesus said to the church of Ephesus, I have this against you. You've got a lot of good things, a lot of good things, but I have this against you. You've left your first love.

Now you repent, get back, or else I'm leaving. Basically, I'll remove the candlestick out of his place. He was in the midst of some golden candlesticks.

He said, get right, start loving one another, or I'm leaving. I won't stay in that kind of an environment. And I think that this is extremely important for us, to realize the type of an environment in which the Spirit can work and do his work.

And if we allow other than this, it'll quench the Spirit. It'll hinder what the Lord is wanting to do within his church. James said, if you have bitter envying and strife in your hearts, glory not in this.

This wisdom does not come from above. It's earthly, it's sensual, it's devilish. For where there is envying and strife, there is confusion and every evil work.

But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then it is peaceable, it's gentle, it's easy to be entreated. It is full of mercy and good fruits. It's without partiality and without hypocrisy.

And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace and them that make peace. The kind of environment in which the Spirit of God works and will work is that loving environment. And the effect of it, of course, is

peace.

And there's just that beautiful flowing then of God's Spirit and the Lord adding to the church then those that should be saved. God wants to bless. We can hinder the blessing of God by a wrong attitude, a wrong spirit.

And so it's important, so important, that we remain in the place where God can continue to bless as he desires to do. Father, we thank you for your many blessings and for the way, Lord, you have added to the church daily. Help us, Lord.

We know how the enemy would like to come and sow tares among the wheat. We know how the enemy would like to come in and bring division and strife and every evil work. But, Lord, help us to walk in love.

Help us to love one another, Lord, even as you loved us and gave yourself for us. May we be kind one to another, Lord, tenderhearted and forgiving one another, even, Lord, as you have forgiven us for Christ's sake. Take away, Lord, all bitterness, rancor, strife, envying, and these things that quench the Spirit of God.

Let there be such love that there will be a full free flowing of the Spirit of God in our midst as we love you and as we love each other. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

Shall we stand? Before you go home, we would encourage you to come on down the front, spend some time in prayer. Maybe the Lord's been speaking to your heart tonight. Maybe there are things in your heart that have quenched the work of the Spirit that He desires to do in your life.

Maybe there is some bitterness, some strife, evil speaking of others or things of that nature. And God can't bless you. He wants to bless you, but He can't bless you when these things are there.

So keep yourself in the love of God. Keep yourself in that place where God can do the loving things for you. He longs to do.

Keep yourself in the love of God. Maybe there's some repentance to be done tonight. The pastors are down here at the front.

It says, confess your faults one to another. Pray one for another that you might be healed. And so you can come on down and just say, pray for me.

I find there's bitterness in my heart over a situation or I'm upset with this person and I have been saying things against them and I need to get it out. I need to get freed from it. I need God's help to just get over this.

And these men will be glad to pray for you and pray with you. And let's seek to keep the environment that is conducive for the Spirit of God to work mightily in our midst. Let's not quench the Spirit.

Let's not grieve the Spirit with these attitudes that come from a prideful heart. May God help us, in Jesus' name. I love you, Lord, and I lift my voice to worship you.

Oh, my soul rejoice. Take joy, my King, in what you hear. May it be a sweet, sweet sound in your ear.

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