

# *THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST*

SPREADING THE SOUL-SAVING MESSAGE OF JESUS

## “CHURCH ORDER”

### **Introduction by narrator accompanied by a cappella singing:**

*THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST*. Spreading the soul-saving message of Jesus. And now, Ben Bailey.

“Let all things be done decently and in order” (1 Cor. 14:40). Welcome to our study of church order. In this series of topical lessons we will be discussing the nature of God, church order, and various other topics that will encourage us to live faithfully before God and to live in accord with the teaching of the New Testament. We first need to ask, “What is the church?” Too many times we get the idea that the church is the building, or that the church is present only at times when its members are assembled. But in reality the church is the people. In 1 Corinthians 12:27, the apostle Paul said, “You are the body of Christ, and members individually.” What is the church? It is the collective group of the saved (Christians). Acts 7:48-50 tells us that God

“does not dwell in temples made with hands, as the prophet says, ‘Heaven is My throne, and earth is My footstool. What house will you build for Me?’ says the Lord, ‘Or what is the place of My rest? Has My hand not made all these things?’”

We are not talking about keeping the grass mowed or keeping up the building. We are talking about organizing our lives, and especially organizing correctly what we do in worship and in salvation. For church order to be accomplished, it must begin with some fundamental teachings on the individual level. God Himself is a God of order and a God of design. When we look at the creation around us, we see that it is composed of order. Genesis 1:1 tells us that “in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” Out of chaos and disorder God formed this world. Psalm 19:1 tells us that “the heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament shows His handiwork.” If we look at the human body, we see that it is designed in an orderly manner. Everything works together. Parts of nature are codependent upon other parts of nature, and it all works intricately together.

Thus, for us to please God, we must excel in church order. Notice again what Paul said in 1 Corinthians 14:40, “Let all things be done decently and in order.” Let’s think for just a few moments about areas in which we should strive to have church order. I might begin a little differently than you might think. For church order to exist, we must make sure that our lives as members of the Lord’s church are lived properly. We must be sure that our lives are in order before our worship and other areas can be in order. What does it mean for us to live our lives in an orderly fashion? First and foremost it means that we must live for Jesus Christ every day. Jesus must be the first thing in our lives, and He must be the main goal or priority. In Matthew 6:33 Jesus taught us, “Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.” If our lives are going to be in order, we must realize that Jesus and the kingdom must come first—above all else (including our jobs, families, or recreation). Christ and the kingdom must be at the top of the list. It only makes sense that that should be the case. Jesus asked a compelling question in Mark 8:36-37, “What will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?” If we gain the entire world, and if we have everything we have ever wanted, but we die and go to Hell, what good has it done us? Sometimes we miss the true purpose of life if we are not looking closely. Solomon

missed it for a while. He sought meaning in building things, in projects, in women, in wine, and in many other things in life. But then he realized what life was really all about, and said, "Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is man's all" (Eccl. 12:13). What is life all about? How can we live an orderly life?

First, we must fear God. And second, we must keep His commandments. We must respect God as God, and then do what He says. In Isaiah 43:7 God said, "Everyone who is called by My name, whom I have created for My glory; I have formed him, yes, I have made him." In 1 Corinthians 10:31 we see an echo of those same types of sentiments: "Whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God." As Paul said in Galatians 2:20, we must die to self. Paul said, "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me." Are you living an orderly life by putting the Lord first? Jesus said, "Be faithful unto death, and I will give you a crown of life" (Rev. 2:10). Paul taught us to present our bodies as a "living sacrifice" (Rom. 12:1). We are taught to "let the love of life compel us" so that we will live for Christ every day. Here is what Jesus said in Luke 9:23 that He demands of us: "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me." To live orderly, we first must live for Jesus every day.

Second, we must abstain from things of the world. This world is not where we want to put our hope. James 4:4 says, "Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God." We cannot live with one foot in the world and one foot in the church—living half heartedly for God and half heartedly for the world. God does not want us to live that way. Some people in the Bible tried that. In Acts 5 Ananias and Sapphira wanted to live in the world, yet they wanted the praise that God and His people could offer, too. Both of them died because they did not put first things first. Think about Demas, of whom Paul said, "Demas has forsaken me, having loved this present world" (2 Tim. 4:10). Think about Balaam, who made one of the greatest statements in the Bible. In Numbers 22 he said, "I will turn neither to the left hand nor to the right, but will do only God has said." Yet ten chapters later he died in battle against the people of God. Why did that happen? Balaam allowed the world to suck him in. He allowed the world to drown out his desire to do the will of God. God said, "Come out from among them and be separate" (2 Cor. 6:17). Do you remember the rich farmer in Luke 12:15-21? He had a great crop, and said to his soul, "You have many goods laid up for many years; take your ease; eat, drink, and be merry." But God said to him, "You fool! This night will your soul be required of you. Then whose things with those be that you have acquired?" That man was not living orderly because he allowed the world to conform him instead of his being conformed to the image of Christ. Notice the words of Ephesians 5:11, which show us how Christians ought to think: "Have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them." Our mindset must be that we will not fellowship with those types of things. We will not be in accord with them. We will not go where worldly people go, and we will not do what worldly people do. We need to "love not the world, nor the things that are in the world" (1 Jn. 2:15-17). Unlike the rich young ruler, we need to be able to give up material things. In Mark 10 he came to Jesus and asked, "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus said, "Keep the commandments." The ruler said, "All this I have done since my childhood." Jesus then told him, "One thing you lack; sell what you have, give to the poor, and come follow Me." Mark 10:22 is one of the saddest verses in the Bible: "He was sad at this word, and went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions." That man let this old world keep him from living an orderly life that fulfilled the will of God.

Why must we not get caught up in the world? There are many reasons. But notice 2 Peter 3:10-12—

“The day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up. Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat?”

We must not get caught up in the world because the Earth and all that is in it will one day be burned up. If our hopes are in this world, and if we are living only for this old world, and one day the world will cease to exist, what will happen to our hopes? There is no hope in that. Living an orderly life means that we must put Christ first. It means that we must not get caught up in the world. And it means that we must see sin as God sees it.

God hates sin. According to Isaiah 30:1, it is something God considers to be defiling. In Psalm 24:3-4 we see that the one who can approach God has “cleans hands and a pure heart.” Sin does not keep our hands clean. Rather, sin dirties our hands. Isaiah 64:6 says that our sins are like “filthy rags.” Sin separates from God. In Isaiah 59:1-2 we read,

“Isaiah Behold, the Lord’s hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; nor His ear heavy, that it cannot hear. But your iniquities have separated you from your God; and your sins have hidden His face from you, so that He will not hear.”

Do we see sin as severing our relationship with God? “There is none righteous; no, not one” (Rom. 3:10). Do we see those who are in sin as being “unrighteousness”? Habakkuk 1:13 tells us that God is “of purer eyes than to behold evil, and cannot look on wickedness.” Do we see sin as something from which God must turn away? In Ezekiel 18:4 the Scriptures say, “The soul who sins shall surely die.” Do we see sin as that which will kill us spiritually? The psalmist commented on sin in Psalm 38:4 when he said, “My iniquities have gone over my head like a heavy burden. They are too heavy for me to bear.” Do we see people in sin as being drowned by it and suffering the weight of it? Romans 6:23 tells us, “The wages of sin is death.” In Numbers 32:23 we read, “If you do not do so, then take note, you have sinned against the Lord; and be sure your sin will find you out.” Do we see sin as something we can’t escape? Sometimes we think, “This is sinful, and it’s bad, but I’ll never really get caught.” Not true! Our sins will find us out. And “the way of the transgressor is hard” (Prov. 13:15). To live an orderly life, we must seek God’s kingdom first. We must make sure that we do not get caught up in the world. We must hate sin, and we must see sin as God sees it.

Once we decide to live our own lives in an orderly fashion, how can we organize the church (the collective body of Christians) so it, too, operates in an orderly fashion? First there must be order when it comes to church authority. We must have unity, and we must have agreement on what is God’s final authority today. The Bible teaches that God and His Son have all authority. God is the Author of mankind. In Genesis 1:26 God said, “Let Us make man in Our image.” God “breathed into man the breath of life, and man became a living being” (Gen. 2:7). Since God is the Author of mankind, He has the right to have “all authority.” But we must realize that Jesus Christ also has all authority today. In Matthew 28:18 Jesus said, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.” If Jesus has “all authority in heaven and on earth,” how much does that leave for you and me? How much does it leave for the pope, or some synod, council, or board of deacons or elders? God has “all authority” in matters of doctrine. Thus, we must submit to Him. Jesus is still the Head of the church (Eph. 1:22-23). To have the church in order, we must understand that authority begins with God and His Son. God has given us His authority in

the Bible, which is where we find God's authority today. God has not left it a mystery. He did not leave it up to every person's whims and desires. God has clearly told us, "Here is where My will resides." In Jeremiah 37:17 and in Romans 5:4 we see two great questions asked: "Is there any word from the Lord?," and "What do the Scriptures say?" John 2:5 teaches us that we must seek that. Jesus' mother said to the servants when they were about to fill some water pots, "Whatever He says to you, do it." If the Bible is our authority, then whatever Jesus says, we must do it. We must be sure that we look to the Bible. Here is the good news. If we look to the Bible, we will not be led astray since it contains everything we need. In 2 Peter 1:3 we read, "As His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue." What's the good news in saying that the Bible is God's authority? It has everything we need to live the best life and to be godly. It is inspired of God (2 Tim. 3:16-17). The Bible is absolute truth (Jn. 17:17). That truth will make us free (Jn. 8:32). Thus, the Bible is God's authority. While elders of the local congregation have authority in matters of option and expediency, we must realize that the Bible contains all authority in matters of doctrine. Yes, Hebrews 13:17 says that we are to submit to and obey the elders, but only in matters of functionality and expediency in order to accomplish God's will on a local level. God still has authority in matters of doctrine. We then must ask, "Where is the authority?"

Second, we must realize that we must have order in the doctrine that we teach. Church doctrine (the doctrine found in the New Testament) must be orderly. That demands unity in doctrine. In 1 Corinthians 4:17 the apostle Paul said that he taught the same thing in all the congregations. If Paul taught the same thing everywhere, then we need to do exactly the same thing today. In Psalm 133:1 we are told, "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!" There is but "one faith" (Eph. 4:4). We can read and understand God's will (Eph. 3:4). Thus, we must strive to have oneness. Notice the thing for which Jesus prayed in John 17:20-21.

"I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me."

If the church is going to be what God wants it to be, then its members must be one. Why is there so much chaos in the religious world? It is because we are not striving to teach the same doctrine that we find in the New Testament. We have allowed human ideas, biases, and centuries of human tradition invade the purity of New Testament Christianity. Order and doctrine demand that we must defend the faith against ungodly doctrine. Ephesians 5:11 says that we are to have "no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness." Jesus was not afraid to defend the purity of God's doctrine. In Mark 12:24 He said to the Sadducees, "You do greatly err because you do not know the Scriptures nor the power of God." It is right and orderly to defend the truth. Don't the words of Jude 3 command all of us to do exactly that?

"Beloved, while I was very diligent to write to you concerning our common salvation, I found it necessary to write to you exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints."

What does it mean when it says that we must "contend"? We must fight, do battle, and exert great energy to make sure that the cause of Christ is not castigated by an ungodly, sinful world.

If that is the case, then let's think about some doctrines in which we need to have order and unity. We certainly need to have order when it comes to the oneness of the Lord's church. There are a host of religious people (and unfortunately even sometimes within the body of Christ) who do not want to the conclusion that God said that there is only one

church. In Matthew 16:18 Jesus said, "I will build My church." It is singular and possessive. Jesus is the church's Founder and Owner. In 1 Corinthians 3:11 we are told that "no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ." He is the Head of the church (Eph. 1:22-23). Paul said that the church is the body, and that, according to Ephesians 4:4, there is just "one body." If the church is the body, and if there is only one body, how many churches are there? We are given the answer in 1 Corinthians 12:13, "By one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free—and have all been made to drink into one Spirit." We know that denominationalism and its division is against the will of God. Paul said that he wrote to the Christians in Corinth because of such divisions. Some said they were "of Paul." Some said they were "of Apollos." Some said they were "of Cephas." Paul said, "Let there be no divisions among you." Here is the clarity with which God points out that there is only one body. Notice the emphasis of 1 Corinthians 12:20—"But now indeed there are many members, yet one body." There are a lot of people who have obeyed the Gospel, and who were baptized for the remission of their sins. But there is only one church. That is all that God ever intended. If our doctrine is going to be orderly, we must proclaim that.

Second, for our doctrine to be orderly we must preach and teach baptism for the remission of sins. We live in a world where the majority of religious people are taught that baptism is something good to do, and something that a person ought to do because Jesus did it. But you can be saved now—and be baptized two weeks later. However, we simply do not find such teaching in the New Testament! The Bible clearly teaches that baptism is something that a person does **before** he is saved. It is the point at which we come in contact with the blood of Jesus. In Acts 22:16 Saul was told, "Arise and be baptized, washing away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord." At what point were Saul's sins washed away? It was at the point of baptism. In John 3:3-5 Jesus said that unless a person is born "of water and the Spirit," he cannot enter the kingdom of God. The text of 1 Peter 3:21 makes it so clear when it says that "baptism does also now save us." If the Bible says that baptism saves us, how dare anyone say that baptism is not essential! In Acts 2:38 Peter said, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins." The purpose of a person's baptism is so that his sins can be washed away. Are we saying that we "earn" our salvation? Of course not! But must we meet God's conditions to receive the free gift of salvation? In any right-thinking person's mind, that would be logical. If a free gift is given, there still can be conditions to accessing that gift. That is all believing, repenting, and being baptized are. Let's see just how plain this is. Look in Mark 16:16 where Jesus said, "He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned." Belief and baptism are both essential to salvation.

The third doctrine that we must proclaim in order to be aligned with the teaching of Christ is that instrumental music in worship is sinful and is not found in the New Testament. Remember that we today are living under the law of Christ. We are under the New Covenant (Mt. 26:28). That being the case, here is what God tells us to do. Ephesians 5:19 says, "Speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord." We are to sing with "the spirit and the understanding" (1 Cor. 14:15). In Matthew 26:30 we see the disciples singing a hymn. "Is anyone happy? Let him sing" (Jas. 5:13-15). Singing is what God has commanded for us today. You will not find a single instance in the New Testament of anyone glorifying God with a piano, organ, guitar, drums, or a banjo. God said that we are to make melody "in our hearts." If we are going to be the kind of people God wants us to be, and if we are going to have order, the God wants our worship to be orderly. Think about the words of Hebrews 12:28-29, and notice specifically that our worship has to be acceptable.

“Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear. For our God is a consuming fire.”

We must serve and worship God acceptably. How do we do that? We do it by doing what the Bible says. I want to ask you today if your life is orderly. Are you seeking Christ first? Are you staying away from the world? Are you seeing sin as God sees it? Do you realize that the Bible is God’s final authority, and that we must say and do only those things that God has said and told us to do? If you have never obeyed the Gospel, more than anything we want to invite you to become a Christian. Hear God’s Word. Believe that Jesus is God’s Son. Repent of those things in your life that are not right. Make the good confession that Jesus is God’s Son. And be baptized in water for the forgiveness of your sins. May God help each of us to live our lives decently and in order so that they glorify Him.

**Narrator accompanied by a cappella singing:**

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## STUDY QUESTIONS FOR “CHURCH ORDER”

1. According to 1 Corinthians 14:40, how are Christians to do “all things”?
2. According to 1 Corinthians 12:27, who composes Christ’s church?
3. According to the material presented in this lesson, before the work of the church can be “in order,” what must occur in the lives of the Christians who compose the church?
4. What did Jesus teach in Matthew 6:33 that can help Christians get their personal lives in order?
5. According to Solomon’s inspired statement in Ecclesiastes 12:13, what should be every person’s goal in this life?
6. What important questions did Jesus ask in Mark 8:36-37 that should remind Christians of how important it is to attain the goal mentioned in question #5 above?
7. An important part of each Christian’s putting his or her life in order is being faithful. In Revelation 2:10, what did Jesus say about faithfulness?
8. According to Isaiah 43:7, what was one thing that God had in mind when He created humans?
9. What did Jesus say in Luke 9:23 about Christians “putting their lives in order”?
10. According to Romans 12:1, how are Christians to live their lives?
11. What instructions are found in James 4:4 that can show Christians how **not** to live their lives if they want to be faithful to God?
12. When it comes to Christians being compared to worldly people, what admonition is found in 2 Corinthians 6:17 that can help Christians avoid falling prey to worldly temptations?
13. What type of person, according to Psalm 24:3-4, is fit to approach God?
14. What type of person, according to Isaiah 59:1-2, is **not** fit to approach God?
15. What does Ephesians 5:11 admonish Christians not to do?
16. According to Matthew 28:18, who has “all authority” in religious matters?
17. What important point regarding “church order” is found in Psalm 133:1?
18. In 1 Corinthians 4:17 the apostle Paul said that he taught the same thing “everywhere in every church.” What does that tell us about the doctrine that should be taught today?
19. According to Matthew 16:18, who is the founder and head of the church?