

The Church And The Bible

Ephesians 2:19-22

Pastor John Miller

The question is: Why do we need the Bible? The answer is because it comes from God, it centers on Christ and it is inspired by the Holy Spirit. We discovered that we are Trinitarian in our understanding of the Bible; all Scripture is given by inspiration of God, it comes from God as a revelation and its main topic is Jesus Christ. It points to Jesus, the Redeemer, the Savior of the world. Any pastor who is preaching the Word is going to preach Christ and Him crucified. He's going to be the center of that preaching message. The message is given by inspiration of the Holy Spirit; it's inspired by God's Spirit. It's breathed by the Spirit of God.

Today, the question we want to ask and seek to answer is: What about the church? What is the relationship of the church to the Bible? I don't think you can separate the church from the Bible or the Bible from the church.

Before we get into that question, I want to ask another question: What do we mean by "the church"? The word "church," as it appears in the New Testament, is the Greek word "ekklesia." The word means "called-out assembly." It has the idea of called-out and an assembly of people. It is used in different ways in the Old Testament, as well as sometimes in the New Testament.

But generally, it has two aspects to it. The church is universal, and the church is also local. We mean by the church universal that it comprises every single person who has been born again. By that I mean the person has been regenerated by the Holy Spirit, and he has the life of God in his soul. They are part of the church. It doesn't matter what denomination or affiliation or race or creed or color or where you live; if you have been born again, you have been taken out of darkness and translated into light, you've been taken out of the kingdom of Satan and translated into the kingdom of God. You are a member of the church. When you travel around the world, you may meet people of different cultures, who go to a different church. They have a different affiliation. But if they are born again, they are brothers and sisters in Christ. You're all part of the family of God.

So the church is much bigger than Revival Christian Fellowship, but Revival Christian Fellowship is a local church, the second category of church. We gather locally here in Menifee, California to worship God and to study His Word and to encourage one another. The Bible says that we "provoke one another to love and good works," Hebrews 10:24. Sometimes we just provoke one another. But we need to provoke and encourage each other to go out and have love and do good works. So we have an up-reach—we worship God; we have an in-reach—we build each other up; and we have an outreach—we go out into our community. We are the salt of the earth and the light of the world. We are a local fellowship of believers.

Central to the universal church and the local church is the book we call the Bible.

The B-i-b-l-e.

Yes, that's the book for me.

By the end of this series, we're going to be singing that song. It's all about the Bible. We gather to study the Bible. We scatter to share the Bible. We go to live the Bible in our daily lives.

Often I am asked, "What is the greatest need in the church today?" My answer has always been the same, and it has never changed. The Bible. You ask, "Are you serious, pastor? You think the Bible is the greatest need in the church today?" I believe that the greatest need in the church today is for the Bible, because a lot of so-called "churches" have drifted away from the Word of God. It's not preached, it's not believed, it's not taught, it's not lived, it's not enthroned in the hearts and the lives of people of this world. We need God's book. If you want a revival, someone said, "We need a re-Bible." That's what a re-Bible brings.

The greatest revivals in the history of the church have centered on the Bible. Whenever the Word of God falls away from the church, the church becomes sick and dies. But whenever the Word of God is central and preached in the church, the church becomes alive. John R. W. Stott said, "The church remains sick and feeble wherever it refuses the healing medicine and wholesome nourishment of the Word of God." I say amen and amen.

There are two complimentary truths I want to focus on concerning the church and the Bible. Number one, the church needs the Bible, and number two, the Bible needs the church. Yes, you heard me right; the Bible needs the church. I'm going to show both of these truths from the Word of God.

In Ephesians 2:19-22, we see, number one, that the church needs the Bible. Paul says, speaking to the church, "Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners..."—by the way, the theme of Ephesians is the body of Christ. The church is called the body, the family, the bride, the army of God, the flock of God—"...but fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God; and are built upon the foundation of the Apostles and prophets..."—notice the foundation of the church is the Apostles' teaching and the prophets' teaching—"...Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone..."—He holds it all together—"...in Whom..."—that is, "Christ"—"...all the building fitly framed together groweth unto a holy temple in the Lord; in Whom ye also are built together for a habitation of God through the Spirit."

There are three pictures of the church in this Ephesians text. We'll focus on number three, but let me give you all three pictures. The first is that the church is called the kingdom of God or God's kingdom. Notice verse 19 and the word "fellow-citizens." So you are no longer strangers but fellow-citizens. That means we live in a new kingdom. The church is a new nation. I love that Paul actually describes it as a new man. It's kind of like a new race of people; there's not Jew or Gentile, not male nor female, but rather we are all one in Christ. We live in this kingdom of God, the church.

The second image is in verse 19, as well. It's seen in the phrase "the household of God"; we're

God's family. We're God's kingdom—fellow-citizens. We're God's family—the household of God. God is our Father, and we are His children. Do you know that we're all one big family? That's cool. These are your brothers and sisters in Christ. I know some of them look a little funny, but they're still your family. We're all one and we all love each other. We're here to encourage one another and pray for each other and exhort one another. We're of the family of God, the household of God.

Then the third imagery I want you to see is in verses 20-22. That is that the church is the temple of God. Notice in verse 20 the phrase "built upon the foundation." And notice the phrase in verse 21 "in Whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto a holy temple in the Lord." That's a reference to the church. Even verse 22, where it says, "In Whom ye also are built together for a habitation of God through the Spirit." So God dwells in the church universally and God dwells in the church locally. That's why when you come to gather here on Sunday morning, Jesus said, "Wherever two or three are gathered together in My name, I am in their midst." So there is just a special sense of God's presence when we gather together with God's people and hear together God's Word.

So we are a holy temple. That's the point I want to make. And the temple needs a foundation. Do you know that the most important part of a building is the foundation? Jesus told a parable about a wise and a foolish builder. The foolish man built a house on sand. And when the floods came and the wind blew, the house fell. The wise, which is what we want to be, built his house on the rock. And when the floods came and the wind blew, the house stood strong.

And Jesus explained the difference. The foolish man hears the Word of God but doesn't put it into practice. He doesn't obey it. The wise man hears the Word of God and puts it into practice. He lives according to God's Word, so he is building his house upon the rock, which is the Word of God, in obedience to God.

Jesus Christ is also that chief cornerstone, holding it all together. I believe that the foundation of the church, as he makes clear in verse 20, is the Apostles' and prophets' teaching and doctrine. The foundation of the Apostles and prophets is found in Holy Scripture.

The church is dependent on the Bible, and I want to give you three ways that the church is dependent on the Bible. Number one, the Bible strengthens the church. There are a lot of ways I could share with you, but I wanted to reduce them down to three important ways. You might say also that the Bible makes the church, because it is the preaching of the Word that brings repentance and faith when people are saved and added to the church.

On the day of Pentecost in Acts 2, Peter preached the first sermon of the church age. He preached a powerful sermon, full of Scripture, preaching Christ, and 3,000 souls got saved and were added to the church. You come into the church by hearing the Word and responding in obedience to Christ, and you're born again and become a member of the church. But once you become a part of the church, the Bible strengthens the church.

To support this point, in 1 Peter 2:1-3, it says, “Wherefore laying aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speakings, as newborn babes...”—or literally, “as newborn ones”—“...desire the sincere milk of the Word, that ye may grow thereby; if so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious.” He tells us to put aside sinful attitudes and behavior.

But the point I want to make is that as newly born babies desire milk, so you as believers should desire the sincere or pure and unadulterated milk of the Word. What we need in the church today is not the Word plus psychology, not the Word plus philosophy, not the Word plus man’s traditions. What we need is simply the Word of God; nothing more, nothing less. Give me God’s Word. Don’t add to it, don’t take away from it, don’t twist it, but give me God’s Word.

He uses that analogy of a baby. We have a grandson who is six-months old. He’s getting so cool. He’s so amazing. He’s still nursing. We were together as a family the other day, my daughter was nursing the baby and when he’s hungry, he lets you know it. There’s no talking to a six-month old child saying, “Just wait an hour and we’ll have lunch together. It’s not time to eat right now.” Waaa! Everything has to grind to a halt; the baby has to be fed. Babies let you know when it’s time to eat. That same hunger as a baby desires pure milk, so should we desire God’s Word.

And you never outgrow that desire. He’s not saying in that text, by the way—people often misinterpret it—that it’s for babies to want God’s Word. He’s saying that like babies hunger for milk, so you as a Christian should constantly, ongoing, continually hunger for the Word of God. You never outgrow your appetite for the Bible. You’re constantly wanting to feed on the Word of God. And if you’re a child of God, you’re going to have a hunger and a thirst for the Word of God.

One of the indications that you’ve been born again and that you are God’s child is you want to read the Bible. People don’t have to tell you to read the Bible. “Give me my Bible. I want to read it. I’m just hungry for God’s Word.” Like a baby that cannot be satisfied, you need and hunger for God’s Word.

In Ephesians 4:11-14, Paul tells us that God has given the church pastors-teachers. By the way, that is one word in the Greek. It is one person. He’s not saying that there are pastors and there are teachers. That is true that there are pastors, and there are people who don’t pastor, but they have the gift of teaching. But in this text Paul is talking about pastors-teachers. I believe that a pastor must be a teacher. If you are a pastor, you must have the gift of teaching and be able to teach God’s Word. That’s how the shepherd, which is what “pastor” means, feeds the sheep. He feeds them with the Word of God.

The pastors-teachers are given to the church for five things: for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of service in the church, for the building up of the body, for the unity of the body and that we “be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine.” So my job as pastor is to teach the Bible, the Word of God, so the saints are matured, so the saints are equipped for service, so the people of God are built up and edified and strengthened,

so there is unity in the church and so we are no longer spiritual babes and infants, but that we grow and mature.

One of my favorite stories is in Acts 20:32. Paul was meeting with a group of elders or pastors from the area of Ephesus. He met them at Miletus, which is on the coast of modern Turkey on the Mediterranean Sea. All the pastors in Asia gathered there in Miletus and came from Ephesus to meet Paul on the beach. Paul poured out his heart to them and talked to them and ministered to them. He was going to leave and never see them again. They were weeping and they were crying. They're weeping together and encouraging one another. It is one of the passages in the Bible that is difficult for me to read without getting emotional, because I'm a pastor, I love pastors, I love to be with pastors and they're meeting on the beach, which is my favorite place to meet. I love to meet pastors on the beach. We call it a board meeting. I'm kidding. But I do love to meet with pastors; I feel that kinship with them. We pray.

Then when he leaves, verse 32, Paul says to them, "And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the Word of His grace..."—What an interesting title for the Scripture—"...which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified." If I were to leave this church, if the Lord were to call me somewhere else, that's what I would say. I would commend you to God and to His Word, to continue in His Word, to hold tight to His Word, to love God's Word and to study God's Word. It is so very important. As Paul said goodbye to these pastors, he said, "I give you God's Word, and it's able to build you up and make you strong."

This year is the 500th anniversary of the Protestant Reformation. It was in 1517 that Martin Luther nailed his 95 theses to the door of the church at Wittenberg. And the world has never been the same. The whole world has been changed by this one man. I like to go back and see that the foundation for the Reformation started with a man named John Wycliffe. He's called the Morning Star of the Reformation. John Hus and William Tyndale are some of the heroes. These are all men who gave the Word of God to the church, put the Word of God in the English language. These are men who gave their lives. They actually died for the Bible. They actually went to prison and died so people could read the Bible. As a result, the entire world has been changed. It's never been the same. How important it is that the church and the world has and hears God's Word. In so many cases, the church is suffering from a famine of hearing the Word of the Lord. So, number one, the church depends on the Bible, because it strengthens the church.

Secondly, the Bible sanctifies the church. In 2 Timothy 3:16, Paul says, "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable." And that's what I want to point out. It's profitable for four things: "for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness." Doctrine is what is right or what is true. Reproof is what is wrong; the Bible kicks us or it rebukes us or it shows us our sin. Correction is how to get right. Instruction in righteousness is how to stay right. It shows us how to have a good marriage, how to have good parenting skills, how to live morally pure lives in a world that is corrupt and dark. We find it all in the Scriptures, in the Word of God. The Bible sanctifies the church. It purifies us and sets us apart.

Thirdly, the Bible equips the church for service. In 2 Timothy 3:17, Paul says, "...that the man of God..."—or "the woman of God"—"...may be perfect..."—the word means "mature"—"...thoroughly furnished unto all good works." If Revival Christian Fellowship is all that it should be—the Word of God is being taught, and you're growing and maturing—every member becomes a servant. Every member becomes a minister.

I was talking to one sister who told me that the Holy Spirit has led her to go out and share, and she's going around and sharing the Gospel. She was in the Dollar Store the other day, and she had this whole crowd of people around her. She was sharing the Gospel and praying for people. She was saying, "Can you believe that, Pastor Miller? In the Dollar Store! I was ministering to people." I thought, Isn't that amazing. God can even work in the Dollar Store! Salt and light.

As you're being built up in the Word of God, you're going out and you're serving the Lord. Some of you are teaching in children's ministry, and some of you are doing other ministry. Some of you are leading small groups. Some are serving as ushers and greeters and hosts, working around the church. God uses His Word to equip us and build us up.

Again, in Ephesians 4:11-12, the pastors-teachers are "for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry." So the pastor's job is to equip the flock so they can do the service. I believe that we are called to use God's Word to bring people to salvation, to bring people into sanctification and holiness and equip them for service. And that's really the mission statement or purpose of Revival Christian Fellowship: salvation, sanctification and service. We do that all through the Word of God.

The second main point: Not only does the church need the Bible, but the Bible needs the church. Yes; you heard me right. You say, "Run that by me again, Pastor Miller. You're telling me that the Bible needs something?" Charles Spurgeon used to say that "The Bible is like a lion in a cage. The Bible doesn't need to be defended; it just needed to be let out of the cage. The lion could take care of itself." And there's some truth to that. But the lion does need to be let out of the cage. The problem today is that the church is not letting the lion out of the cage. So the Bible needs the church. The church serves the Bible.

1 and 2 Timothy and Titus are what is known as "pastoral epistles." They are written to pastors about how they conduct themselves in the church. In 1 Timothy 3:14-15, Paul says, "These things write I unto thee..."—so he tells Timothy why he's writing—"...hoping to come unto thee shortly, but if I tarry long..."—"if I don't get to you"—"...that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God." So he makes this statement about the church being the house of God. Notice what he goes on to say. "...the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth."

Now this is very subtle, and a lot of people might miss it or misunderstand it. Now the metaphor changes. First we have the church needing the Bible, but now we have the Bible needing the church. Why? Because the church is the "pillar" and the "ground of the truth." Not only does

the church need the Bible, but the Bible needs the church. In saying that the church is the “pillar” and “the ground of truth,” it means that as a pillar we hold high God’s Word. It means as the “ground” or foundation, we hold firm to God’s Word. What does a pillar do? It holds things up. But it’s based on the foundation.

So we do two things in the church with the Bible: we hold God’s Word high, and we hold firmly or tightly on God’s Word. Someone said that “We proclaim it, evangelistically; we protect it, apologetically.” I love that. Another weakness of the church today is that they’re simply not preaching the Gospel; that man is a sinner, Jesus died for our sins, Jesus was buried and rose again the third day and that faith in Jesus Christ brings salvation. That’s the Gospel. Repent, believe and be forgiven. There’s a lot of other stuff going on, and we’re really not preaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ. God has entrusted His Word to the church. It’s called stewardship. God gives us His Word and expects us to preach it, to publish it, to translate it, to promote it and get God’s Word out.

2 Timothy 1:13-14 says, “Hold fast the form of sound words, which thou hast heard of me, in faith and love, which is in Christ Jesus; that good thing which was committed unto thee, keep by the Holy Ghost, which dwelleth in us.” So God entrusted Timothy and the church there with the Word of God. God entrusted us with His Word. The first thing we are to do is hold it fast. The second thing I want you to notice, in verse 14, we are to “keep” God’s Word.

So what does the church do to serve the Bible? We hold it fast—we don’t veer off and go some other direction. “Oh, yeah. We used to read the Bible. We used to believe the Bible. We used to have Bible study groups, but now we have progressed beyond that.” The church becomes a social club. “The church isn’t preaching the Word, so I’m just going to join a country club somewhere. At least I can play golf there. I can’t play golf at the church.” You know, we have to have a golf course, we have to have a gymnasium, we have to have a swimming pool, we have to have a coffee shop. You have to have everything for the church to hang out. That’s okay; I’m fine with that. But if all we do is get together in a holy huddle, then who witnesses to people? We need to take the Gospel to the world. “Let’s have our own restaurant at the church.” Why don’t we go to heathen restaurants and share the Gospel? Christians walk into the restaurant and say, “Is this a sanctified restaurant? Can we have a Holy Ghost, Spirit-filled waitress? We don’t want cooties.” We’re to hold fast to God’s Word. We’re to keep God’s Word.

The Bible needs to be translated. There are people groups who need the Bible in their own language. Can you imagine not having a Bible to read? In some churches, they don’t have Bibles to read. Let’s take the Bible to them. Let’s support Bible translation. I’ve had the privilege, three different times, to smuggle Bibles, back in the day when it was very dangerous. We smuggled Bibles into China. I remember being in China with Chinese New Testament Bibles in Cantonese in my pockets and in my coat and literally just being mauled by people grabbing them out of my pockets. They wanted the Word of God so much.

That first night in the hotel, we had this little Cantonese New Testament, and the maid came in to clean the room. She said, “Is that a Bible?”

We said, "Yes."

She said, "Can I have it?" We gave her a Bible. The next day she came back and said, "I stayed up all night reading it. Very good book!"

Just the thrill of getting God's Word out! That's why the Bible needs us. We need to support the Gideons and other ministries that are getting the Word of God out. We as a church are taking it by radio—by Revival radio—and it's going to more places around the world. God is using the radio ministry, and what a blessing that we're participating in that. Getting God's Word out; to translate it, to print it, to distribute it, to preach it.

So what the church does to serve the Bible is we hold it fast, we keep it and then we must rightly divide it. Look at 2 Timothy 2:15. Right here in these pastoral epistles, there is so much instruction for the pastors—the Word of God and the church. "Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman..."—It doesn't tell us what kind of workman, and we don't know whether or not this was a stone mason or a farmer or whether it was a tent maker—"...that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the Word of truth." What makes us not ashamed? If we "rightly divide the Word of truth."

The word "study" there doesn't mean to get your books out and dictionaries and concordance and study—which is good to do—but the word "study" there means to be eager or to be zealous. It means to be excited about the Word of God. Then "rightly dividing" it means to cut straight. Some believe that Paul was using the analogy from his own field of experience, which was tent making. They would have to cut animal skins and sew them together to make a tent.

When I was a little boy, I used to like watching my mom sew. She had patterns, and she would pin the patterns to the material and take those gnarly scissors that look like crocodile teeth and would cut the material out. She would sew it together. She would have to cut the pattern straight so everything would fit together properly.

So Paul is saying that when we study God's Word, when we interpret God's Word, when we explain God's Word, cut it straight. This is something I'm committed to as a pastor; when I read the text, I explain the text in its historical, grammatical, theological context. If I'm preaching the Word, I'm giving you the meaning of the text. I'm not imposing my ideas on the text. We pull out the meaning of the text, and then we explain it. That's Biblical preaching. It's called "expositional preaching." If we put our ideas into the text, that's called "eisegesis." That's putting our ideas into the text. A lot of preachers will do that. They'll read a verse, they say a lot of good things, happy things, positive things, but you're scratching your head saying, "But is that really what that verse meant?" No. But he had to make it look like a Christian sermon, so he read from the Bible. It's not really an exposition of the Bible.

Please, please listen to me. This breaks my heart: A lot of people will go to churches where the Bible is read but not expounded or it's not explained. It's not preached. They just read a verse so everyone feels good and happy, and then there's a feel-good, I'm okay-you're okay,

happy pep talk. Nothing negative. Nothing doctrinal. They don't talk about hell. They don't talk about repentance. Just happy thoughts. That's not faithful, Biblical preaching. That's not "rightly dividing the Word of truth."

I'm not here to win your approval. I'm not here for a popularity contest. I'm not here so that you'll like me. I'm here so that God approves of me. I want God's approval, and God's approval alone. I want Him to say some day, "Well done, good and faithful servant...enter thou into the joy of thy Lord." That's what's important to me. And that's what the church is supposed to be, and that's what the church is supposed to do: "rightly dividing the Word of truth."

Then, fourthly, the church serves the Bible by continuing in God's Word. So we hold fast to God's Word, we keep God's Word, we rightly divide God's Word and we continue in God's Word. 2 Timothy 3:14 says, "But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of Whom thou hast learned them."

Then, fifthly and lastly, the church serves the Bible by preaching God's Word. We must preach God's Word. In 2 Timothy 4:1-5, Paul says, "I charge thee therefore before God..."—and remember that these are the last recorded words of the Apostle Paul. After he wrote these words to Timothy, he was executed. So he is pouring out what is most important in his mind for this pastor and the church—"...and the Lord Jesus Christ, Who shall judge the quick..."—or "alive"—"...and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom." What are they to do? "Preach the Word..."—don't preach philosophy or psychology or religion. Don't preach man's wisdom, but preach the Word. Nothing more, nothing less. And he tells them how to do it: "...be instant in season, out of season..."—do it when it's popular and when it's not popular. Do it with relevancy—"...reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering..."—with "patience and intelligence"—"...and doctrine. For the time will come..."—he tells him why he should preach the Word—"...when they will not endure sound doctrine, but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; and they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables. But watch thou in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry."

The church serves the Bible, by preaching it, by promoting it, by believing it, by living it, by submitting to its authority. When you come to church, we reach up to God in worship, and we can't worship God Who we don't know. We learn about God in His Word.

When we come to church we reach in and build each other up. We do that through the Word of God. We do it in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs. We sing and make melody in our hearts to the Lord. We share the Scriptures. We encourage each other in the Word of God. And I hope and pray that as the Bible is opened here on Sunday and you hear God's Word that you are built up and edified.

Then the church reaches out. We take the Bible to a world that needs the light. The Bible is the light. It is a "lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path." We need to take the Word of God to the world. We need to tell people about it. We need to live it before people. We are the

church. God has given us His Word. We need to get it out.

I could preach a whole sermon just on these five verses of 2 Timothy 4. That's kind of why I'm running out of steam right now; I don't know what else I can say. The church is to preach God's Word. Amen.