

Authority: Congregation

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[0:00] I would love yet to say good morning to you. Good morning. Please take your copy of God's Word and join me in Ephesians chapter 4. We're going to continue this morning, week three of four, on a series on authority.

And as I've done the last two weeks, and probably will do every time we teach something topical, I just want to warn you to be extra discerning as we open up the Bible in this way.

It's good. It's really valuable for us to take up topics from time to time and think about broadly what the Bible has to say about a particular thing. But we must be cautious as we do it. We want to be so careful that we don't read into the text what we want it to say, but rather that the Bible itself communicates to us about a topic.

So, we've been working on this issue of authority, and I told you before that we're doing this largely because the congregation, a number of you were asking for us to teach more about congregationalism.

For us to help you wrap your minds around what the Bible has to say about such a thing. I worry about sermons like this. I've been thankful that some of you have expressed encouragement across the past two weeks.

[1:22] But it can feel a little bit just like the mechanics of things. Like, why does this matter for us? But this one perhaps matters most readily as we think about the responsibility of the church, the authority the church has, and more specifically, the congregation.

So, what does it mean to be a congregationalist? We are a congregationalist congregation. What are the responsibilities held by the congregation, and therefore, what authority does the congregation have?

These are important questions for us to ask and answer if we're going to be a healthy church. So, I hope that our time together this morning will help us all have clear answers to those questions in our minds.

Now, before we delve into congregationalism and look at Ephesians chapter 4, I need to remind you that I have made eight overarching biblical assertions in our study so far.

And so, you'll do well to listen to the previous recordings of the sermons if you weren't with us. But I quickly want to give them to you because they're important as framework, especially if you haven't been with us so far.

[2:41] So, number one, God's authority is innate. That means it belongs to him, and nobody gave it to him, right? He is the ultimate authority figure because he is God.

And that authority is final because he is God. He is the highest of authority. And if he wasn't, he wouldn't be God.

Secondly, God's authority is necessarily good, whether we recognize it or experience it to be good. It's necessarily good because he is good, right?

He's 100% good all the time. And so, his authority is necessarily good. Thirdly, humankind has an authority problem.

We just generally don't seem to like it. We've experienced a lot of misplaced and misspent authority. We have good reason to be suspect of authority.

[3:43] But at our very core, our sinful nature wants to reject authority, authority of God's making. So, humankind has an authority problem, and we do well to remember that as we come to the issue and think about

authority.

Number four, we are delegated authority. Part of the way God works his authority in the world is through delegated authority. And that delegated authority always has limits and is always subservient to the one who delegated it.

It's been given parameters, that authority, and therefore, it is subservient to the higher authority of the one who granted it, which is God.

Number five, when a person or institution takes up a responsibility not granted to them, or exercise an authority granted to them in a way not granted to them, it is, at best, ineffective.

It is, at worst, abusive. Right? So, we want to be clear on our categories. What authorities have been given to whom, and how should that authority be exercised?

[5:02] Sixth, the aim of exercising authority, and this is, I stole this from Jonathan Lehman's book on authority. This is his subtitle. In submission to God's good authority, it's for the sake of protecting the vulnerable, strengthening our communities, and promoting human flourishing.

Right? So, it has good purpose in mind. Godly authority exercised properly is for the good of people. Number seven, God delegates his authority through three institutions and six positions. Because I've talked about these now for two weeks, I'm going to breeze through them fairly quickly. But we see in the Bible three institutions. We see the family, we see the church, and we see the government.

Okay? The family, the church, and the government. And within those institutions, there are positions. So, in the family, we have the role of husband and the role of parent.

So, both have granted authority. In the church, we see the role of elder, the position of elder, and the position of congregation.

[6:10] So, all of us as a whole, together, has an authority. In the government, we have various offices, kings, governors, judges, citizens, etc.

And then an extra institutional, unless you are employed by the church or government, we have the position of employer, boss, manager, etc.

There are commands and authorities given there as well. Within, number eight, within these three institutions and six positions, there is granted two types of authority.

Number one, there is the authority of command or coercion, which is the power to make someone do something by force. It possesses the right of corrective discipline.

And I have spoken to you about how those institutions we see in the Scripture, a tool is given to each one of them. For the family, it is the rod. For the church, it is the keys.

[7:11] And for the government, it is the sword. And that's this authority of command or coercion. And so we want to think about that authority and how it applies to each of those institutions.

Today, to the church and the congregation. Secondly, we see the authority of counsel or persuasion. The power to convince someone to do something.

Now, we can only call this authority or power if it has some measure of bearing on you. Unlike the advice you might receive from a friend, the authority of counsel has weight.

There's actually an authority behind it. And an example which we considered at length last week is the authority of counsel that an elder holds. We argue that an elder does not have the power of coercion or command, but rather the authority of counsel or persuasion.

But there is an authority there because the author of Hebrews, in Hebrews chapter 13 and verse 17, this is just the beginning of that verse, says, Obey your leaders and submit to them.

[8:24] For they are keeping watch over your souls as those who have to give an account. And so, last week I asked the question, To what extent is the author of Hebrews expecting his hearers to obey and submit to their leaders?

Certainly not outside the bounds of the Bible, but if he only intends to have them obey and submit to the Bible, why not just say that?

As they exercise this authority of counsel, why not just say, When they teach you the Bible, in the way you want the Bible taught, then you should listen to them.

He doesn't say that. He says you should obey and submit to them. And the reason I presented to you is because there are matters of application of the Bible, gray areas that require careful navigation and decisions that must be made.

So, I suggested to you that elders of a church possess authority in matters of prudence, careful, wise application of the Bible in a particular circumstance, and in matters of preference.

[9:33] All the particulars, the so many things that need to be decided in the life of a church. And my example was what time a meeting begins. While we might care, we do, about your input and want to receive feedback, we still just have to make a decision at some point about what we think is the best time.

Beloved, you don't want pure democracy in the life of our church. There is not enough time in your day for us to have the number of meetings we would have to have.

You likely have no idea all of the details that have to be decided and all of the counsel that needs to be given. And you may think, well, I don't want to help decide everything.

I just want to help decide the significant things. But what constitutes significant? And who decides what or when something is significant?

If we were to operate this way, the whole matter would be just a mess. Recall the assertion I made previously, when a person or institution takes up a responsibility not granted to them or exercise an authority granted to them in a way not granted to them, it is at best ineffective.

[10:53] It is at worst abusive. And I know that none of us want to be abusive. Certainly we don't want to be ineffective. But I think that's where we find ourselves if we're not clear about how the church should function.

So, our church believes that the most biblically faithful form of polity or governance is what is often called elder-led congregationalism.

That's the term that we pick up and use. Elder-led congregationalism. And we can see both of these authoritative roles in our starting text for today's study.

So join me in Ephesians chapter 4. And we'll begin in verse 11 and read through verse 16. And he, being Christ, gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds, and teachers to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes.

Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.

[12:42] This is a really important text. It's a paramount text for us to understand how it is that the church is meant to function.

In fact, I just wanted to show you, you may note that in my Bible, if you can see this, this is the page that is most likely to fall out first in this particular copy because I go to this text quite often.

This text begins with Jesus Christ giving gifts to the church. You see this in verse 11. We see the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds, and teachers.

Now, first I want to say, there's a lot of debate about what these gifts are and how they functioned and or function now. So I just want to give you a brief aside as I don't intend for this to be an exhaustive exposition of this passage.

Remember, we're really talking about elder-led congregationalism. That's the focus. But I think it's helpful for us to see this just for a moment. I believe that the apostles and prophets that Paul is referring to were modern apostles and prophets of his day, not today, but of his day, who were in the process of writing the New Testament and the Old Testament prophets as the books of the Old Testament were often referred to as the prophets.

[14:11] Additionally, if you look back a bit at Ephesians chapter 2, verse 19 and 20, there Paul says this, So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone.

So, in their day, he's writing to the Ephesian Christians. I think he's saying, he's referring back to the prophets, the books you already have, as well as this new teaching that's being brought to you by the apostles, right?

So, we have today the very same foundation for the church, the apostles and the prophets. I think what he's referring to in chapter 4 and verse 11, for us, are the Old and New Testaments.

I think that's what he's talking about when he says the apostles and the prophets. We have the scripture. And we should not belittle that, right? That's not a light thing to have, right? But as I believe Paul is doing, we should magnify it as a gift to the church.

So, Christ gave to us the scriptures and the evangelists and the shepherds and teachers. Many of you are using the same translation that I do to preach from the ESV.

[15:40] And you may note that each of these roles are separated by a comma. But not shepherds or you could think pastors here and teachers.

Not pastors or shepherds and teachers. We know that ancient Greek did not have equivalent punctuation to our English, so this was a translative decision.

The translators decided where they wanted to place those commas. And I am happy to say that the ESV translators are not anti-Oxford comma. If you are anti-Oxford comma, I would like to have a conversation with you later.

I think they liked the Oxford comma and they left it out intentionally because the Greek word translated and can also be translated that is or in particular.

So it could read shepherds, that is teachers, or shepherds in particular teachers, which is a little clunky in the English, but does give us a better idea of who these men are.

[16:47] So they merely leave it out. Shepherds and teachers. Many simply say that this could have been translated shepherd teachers or pastor teachers and we also understand these men to be elders.

We have further evidence that this is Paul's meaning when he writes to Timothy in 1 Timothy chapter 5 and verse 17. There he says, let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching.

He ties those activities together to the elder, the overseer. So evangelists and elders are gifts given to the church.

They employ the Bible, but for what reason? And verse 12 tells us to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ.

Now, once again, we have a translative decision being made because there are some commas placed in verse 12. In the translation I'm using, there's a comma right after the word ministry and there's a comma right after Christ.

[17:59] Some, though, have translated this and put a comma after the word saints. So, to equip the saints, comma, for the work of ministry, comma, for building up the body of Christ.

And if you could just think, put on some grammar minds for just a moment and think behind saints. who is doing the work of ministry if we put a comma behind saints?

It's evangelists and shepherd teachers. However, if you exclude it, the job of those evangelists and shepherd teachers is to equip the saints for the work of ministry and what follows at the end of the verse for building up the body of Christ is the point of that very ministry.

It's modifying that idea. What is the work of ministry? It is the building up of the body of Christ. And so you would think, well then, how do we know? How are we to know?

Well, the text gives us some really great clues. I think contextually, it's responsible to leave out that comma after saints. So let me read it again quickly to you and just point those things out to you.

[19:12] How do we know that the evangelist and the shepherd teacher employing the scripture is meant to train the church for the work of ministry, for this building up.

Right? We see it starting in verse 13. Until, we're being built up, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God to mature manhood to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ so that we may no longer be children tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness and deceitful schemes.

Okay? So we don't want to be these immature Christians. We want to be mature Christians able to stand up to the counter-truth. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into

Him who is the head, into Christ.

All of us speaking the truth in love, all of us growing. And if you're not with me yet, verse 16 says, from whom the whole body, Christ being the head, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.

Right? That's the work of ministry that all of us together are ministering the gospel to all of us together so that all of us together grow into this maturity.

[20:43] I hope you can see that. Right? To equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ.

So as a member of this church, you have a role in this church. You're not a consumer. You don't just come and get served. You are meant to also serve others to this great end.

So elders lead by teaching in word and in deed, giving theological foundation and exemplified application so that the church as a whole does this work of ministry, this building up of the body of Christ.

It also bears saying that the evangelists share the gospel, that the church would increase through conversions, and that the church as a whole would share the gospel for that same end.

Now I said, we can see both of these authoritative roles in our starting text for today's study. I hope that I've sufficiently shown you the authority of counsel that an elder holds in such a way that you can see the same authority here, this persuasive authority.

[21:58] But what about the congregation? What about the congregation? The congregation or the church as a whole is doing two things in this text. We see them firstly, teaching the truth.

They're teaching. They're teaching one another the truth. Verse 13 and 14, until we all attain the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God to mature manhood to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ so that we're no longer children tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness and deceitful schemes. And beloved, there is so much out there pressing at our thinking from every single direction, maybe more than in any other generation because we have the internet. If you ask me if there's one thing I could do to bring about maturity in my church, I think I would say let's destroy the internet.

I don't think it's been a net positive for the life of the church. And you perhaps yourself have felt that and maybe you've seen others tossed around.

They hear a thing and it sounds good until they hear another thing that sounds good and those two things may run in direct contradiction to each other and we should be people who are so founded in God's word that we can discern all of that stuff that comes at us in the world around us.

[23:24] The enemy is seeking to erode the foundation of our faith. Human cunning, craftiness in deceitful schemes.

And so we have to speak the truth to one another. And while the preaching of God's word on the Lord's day is extremely important to the life of a church, it's of major importance.

It is the broadest discipling that we can do as a church. All of the little day-to-day stuff also matters. It all needs to be happening all the time if we're to stand against these waves that will come our way.

So we see the congregation having been equipped to do it, turning around and doing that very same thing, teaching the truth. We also see them applying the truth.

Verse 15 to 16, speaking the truth in love. We're to grow up in every way into him who is the head. We're to learn what it means to be a follower of Jesus Christ.

[24:35] Right? Not just in the gray matter between our ears, but in everything that we do. From whom the whole body joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped.

He's talking about you and me there. Every joint with which it is equipped. The whole body held together when each part is working properly makes the body grow so it builds itself up in love.

I mean, there's just limitless activity packed within verse 16. All of the varied ways that God calls us to love and serve one another.

So there's a teaching of the truth and there is an implying of the truth. the congregation, the church as a whole, is responsible for discipling and they are responsible for doctrine.

This is that work of ministry, building up the body of Christ. I have told you that the congregation has the authority of command or coercion and I have told you that God delegates authority and that it always has limits and is always subservient to the one who delegated it.

[25:45] So I want to take you to some other text to show you that the two areas that the congregation holds authority in are discipline and doctrine. Let's think a bit together about those two and specifically how we're meant to carry them out.

Now, if you've ever heard me talk about ecclesiology at all, you've heard me say this stuff, but nonetheless, let's be reminded together. So that first responsibility of discipling, turn with me to the book of Matthew.

Let's start in chapter 28 and verse 18. Three verses you may be familiar with. Make the point clear for us.

And Jesus came and said to them, and I like that the word authority is here, all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore, and he doesn't say I'm granting you authority to go, but he is in fact sending us and we find elsewhere that there's an authority that goes with us. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations. In all of your going, be about this work of teaching people how they're to follow me.

[26:55] Baptizing them, there we see the church at work in the ordinance of baptism in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you, to know it and to live it and behold, I'm with you always to the end of the age.

So at the very outset we can see that the authority that we have has been granted to us and it accompanies us. Jesus' power goes with us when we go about this work of discipling.

But there's a way that we are to go about this work. There's a process by which we are to teach people how to follow Christ.

And I will say to you that this happens most readily in the life of a local congregation. I got in a friendly conversation with one of our campus ministry directors and what I was trying to say to him was he was stepping out of bounds for what a campus minister can really accomplish.

And I was saying this as a kindness to him. He was overwhelmed with the work that he had on his plate. He had way too much going on. So I was trying to get him to dial back how much he felt like he needed to disciple college students.

[28:18] And I was making the case to him you need to help them be involved in a local church. This would be the best thing for those young people. And he just didn't seem to quite get it.

And so I made the case to him I said I'm not saying that I personally can be a more effective minister of the gospel than you can be a minister of the gospel. In fact this man had much more training than I do.

But I said there's no authority given to the campus ministry to disciple young people. The church has that authority to correct the sin in young people's lives.

and his response to me which was just heartbreaking a Southern Baptist Seminary educated young man said well you're going to tend to disciple with discipline.

Yep those words are the same. He said we're going to tend to disciple with grace. And it was such a shocking statement to me that I just kind of crumbled inside.

[29:27] I didn't even know really how to unpack such a statement. And it was just so clear that he misunderstood who has been granted the authority to teach all that I've commanded.

To help these people to observe all of those things. So let me show you this further. Back up a few pages to Matthew chapter 16. I'll begin reading in verse 13.

Here we see Jesus ask a question. Verse 13 says 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.

Jesus answered him blessed are you Simon Barjona 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 he's playing with

the meaning of the word Peter but I think he's referring to the thing that Peter has proclaimed that he's the Christ.

[30:42] I will build my church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. You're probably familiar with that text but what does verse 19 say? Something curious.

He says 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. So there's that tool that I mentioned previously that's given to the church and I'm arguing that that's the church as a whole as a congregation is given these keys and we're meant to be doing a work of binding and a work of loosing.

But it doesn't seem to explain what that is in Matthew chapter 16. And because we often read the Bible far too piecemeal we are just left shrugging our shoulders.

What in the world is he talking about? Keys? Binding? Loosing? What? Well, a few short chapters later in Matthew chapter 18 we learn exactly what he's talking about.

So turn there. Matthew 18. I'll begin reading in verse 15. Before I read this I want to say this is a picture of discipling work in the church.

[31:53] I sometimes get tired of people using this just to refer to what they would say church discipline and that is to put somebody out of the church. This is more than that. So hear it with me.

Beginning verse 15. If your brother sins against you go and tell him it's fault between you and him alone. If he listens to you you have gained your brother. He's saying if somebody who professes to be a Christian is acting in a way that is contrary to that confession go and tell them.

Help them to see it. And if he hears you if he heeds what you're saying which would lead to repentance and faith you have gained your brother. We have seen that his confession is true.

That kind of discipling work happens all the time in the life of a healthy church. It's happening constantly. Verse 16.

But if he does not listen take one or two others along with you that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. You're taking some further opinion along.

[33:05] We all see this the very same way. Look at the text. It's very clear that you're living in contradiction to this command. You pile up on him for his good.

Verse 17. If he refuses to listen to them tell it to the church. Here it is. The congregation. Those gathered. And if he refuses to listen even to the church let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.

an outsider. So there's four steps going on here. Repentance and faith. A possibility at every step. And cut up the final one where you say we once thought you were in Christ but now as far as we can tell you no longer are.

Your life does not line up to the profession that you make. Now. Verse 18. Look at the phrasing. Truly I say to you whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven.

And whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. So the keys to the kingdom are this very careful work we do of bringing people into the life of the church.

[34:23] The ordinance that accompanies that is baptism. Doing the work of correcting sin in their life that their confession and their life lines up together in ever increasing ways.

things. And in some tragic cases for the good of that person and the witness of the church seeing them out of the life of the church. That is the keys to the kingdom.

This is the discipling work that belongs to the congregation as a whole. thing. So when somebody asks me what I say when I mean I'm a congregationalist pure democracy is not what pops into my head.

Voting on every single thing that we are going to do as a church. This is what I'm thinking about. This really important work of helping people mature in Christ.

Making sure that their confession is a true confession. That they would be preserved to the end.

What a task. I began talking about this with the great commission because I wanted you to be reminded that Jesus says that all authority belongs to him and he is with us because this is a big task.

[35:35] Join me if they're like I'm going to move really fast so you may not care to but he says there and there's been some rather horrific sexual things going on in the life of this church and there he says beginning in verse three for though absent in body I am present in spirit and as if present I have already pronounced judgment on the one who did such a thing when you are assembled in the name of the Lord Jesus and my spirit is present with the power of the Lord Jesus you are to deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord what he's communicating is that you're supposed to take sin so seriously that when a person lives in contradiction to their confession you put them out of the church that they would see the seriousness of their sin there's the hope that they see!

I think was a familial thing so perhaps you're not even going to have a meal with this person because you want to be so clear about their status with the Lord he says for what have I to do with judging outsiders is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge God judges those outside purge the evil person from among you so this work is an incredibly important work for the good of the individual for the witness of the church and it is a responsibility and an authority that belongs to the entire congregation so what happens in my previous example of a college student who's only getting any spiritual direction from a college ministry which college ministries have their place don't hear me say they don't but if that's the only place it's coming from everything is great until he doesn't like something that he's told hey man you can't be doing that with your girlfriend and he goes

I'll do what I want there's no authority granted to that organization to do anything to follow up but the church has a response to unrepentant sin and this is very very good for people if you are a Christ follower you ought to want to submit yourself to that kind of authority I need it in my life I am blind to my sin sometimes and I need to be shown it and I hope that I'm a first step discipline kind of guy I want to just live in verse 15 I don't want to go any place else beyond that when I'm the person being corrected I in the life of our church but if I'm not willing to repent oh I hope because sin is serious and I want to persevere to the end

I want this good authority of the congregation for me so back in our text draw your mind to it Ephesians 4 all of this language about us attaining the unity of the faith the knowledge of the mature manhood the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ so we're no longer children tossed to and fro by every wind of doctrine by every human cunning and deceitful scheme all of this stuff this is that careful work that we're doing in the life of the church right and this has been given to us this authority because God loves us and he loves the purity of his church on the back of your bulletin is a quote from William Gurnall I'll encourage you to look him up he said God would not rub so hard if it were not to fetch out the dirt that is ingrained in our natures God loves purity so well that he would rather see a hole than a spot in his child's garments it's not always easy to exercise this authority or to submit to this type of authority but if it's being properly exercised it is for our eternal good so authority what follows authority for discipline what follows from that is doctrine right if we're to teach people all that

Jesus has commanded what are we supposed to be teaching Galatians chapter 1 verse 8 and 9 Paul said this but even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preach to you let him be accursed as we have said before now I say again if anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you teaching the wrong doctrine needs to be corrected the truth must be preserved and it must be defended David Gibson in an article entitled assumed evangelicalism some reflections in route to denying the gospel he said this you may have heard the story of the Mennonite brethren movement one particular analysis goes like this the first generation believed and proclaimed the gospel and thought that they were certain social entailments conclusions the next generation assumed the gospel and advocated the entailments the third generation denied the gospel and all that were left were the entailments so preached it assumed it forgot it we have to be so careful not to do this very thing and this is a congregational responsibility this includes elders giving leadership to it but it also includes you it it is always a shuddering thing to read

[42:28] Acts chapter 20 verse 28 through 30 where Paul saying his farewell to the Ephesian elders and he says pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers to care for the church of God which he obtained!

with his own blood I read that text to you last week and he says this I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you not sparing the flock so there's a there's a defense thing happening that that that untrue things are going to come in from the outside and then he says in verse 30 and for among your own selves will rise men speaking twisted things to draw away the disciples after them so all of us every one of us needs to be vigilant in protecting doctrine Jude writes in verse 3 and 4 of his lever beloved although I was very eager to write to you about our common salvation I found it necessary to write appealing to you to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints for certain people have crept in unnoticed who long ago were designated for this condemnation ungodly people who pervert the grace of our God into sensuality and deny our only master and Lord Jesus Christ so you see people coming in not living consistent with their confession and changing that confession all together so we are to protect preserve defend the truth all of us to do this work in what measure what doctrines must we defend what convictions do we contend for we certainly don't want to come together and do this work and try to work out every little tiny particular oh what a mess that might be and here's where and I'll spare you today because I'm noticing the time present to you the idea of theological triage if you've been around you've heard me talk about this before if you've not I've got time after we're done I'd be happy to share it with you but what

I think we need to be applying from this idea of theological triage is really defending those doctrines that are necessary for salvation an example justification by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone pride out of my dead hands this is the hill that I will die on as a congregation we need to stand on that hill together and that is a doctrine that's being destroyed around us this morning all over the place this morning in churches it's being destroyed justification by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone that people would be saved as an example also secondary doctrines those things that we believe that we should agree upon to fellowship as a local congregation what will we call sin and not call sin and there's a number of complicated matters to think about the simplest example is baptism how do we practice such a thing more complicated ones what do we think about divorce and remarriage

And we have to be careful about that right? Because we collectively may have to approach somebody that we think is sinning and we don't want to be split down the middle about what we think about this what a difficult thing to disciple somebody if we're all on a different page on such an issue So those types of things are gathered into what are most often called confessions statements of faith creeds etc We are confessional people Now if somebody ever asks you if your church is confessional you should ask them what they mean by that But we are in fact confessional because we believe that it is important to make truth claims concerning what the Bible teaches on any particular topic You have to make truth claims Some people will say things like no creed but Christ which I think is funny because that itself is a creed That's a statement of truth

[46:51] We think it's important to say what does the Bible teach on particular things Our congregational recitations on Sunday morning are an expression of this belief We call and respond through historic confessions and catechisms that we are in agreement with and currently we're reciting our own current statement of faith Wonderful thing What do we believe about such and such Now some of you know and many of you don't right now your elders are working on a more robust statement of faith because we think it's going to be important for us to more clearly define what we think the Bible teaches on a number of topics as this age continues to get harder And harder!

And guess what? You get to be involved in that whole process But in our elder led congregationalism we're giving leadership to it We're working hard to start with a historic document we're working hard to make what we believe are appropriate changes to that document We're going to bring it to you and ask you to pour over it and ask questions and come back and it could be terrible but I also want to suggest it could be a joy that we would open the word together and see what God has!

So these two areas are together is for discipling and for doctrine So what does that look like in action?

You see it all the time Sermons preached classes taught Discipling relationships where the Bible is read and studied and applied Earnest prayer for one another Burdens born Weeping together Rejoicing together Food provided Sin confronted and corrected Discipline processes carried out and sadly from time to time to their very end Evangelism and missions Welcoming new members through the ordinance of baptism Celebrating the Lord's Supper together each Lord's Day Confessionalism and all that it entails doing the exercise of careful theological triage in the life of our church I could go on but note that you the congregation the church as a whole have a profound and precious responsibility and what

I want you to hear is be freed to do this this most important work for the good of our people and for the witness of the gospel to the glory of our great God don't get distracted by the minutia it's not the most important thing we as your elders want to lead you by equipping you for the work of ministry the building up the body of Christ and we want to free you to do that and to do it well to the glory of our God let's pray together