



## Pastor Jesus

*Before we can discuss* church leadership, we must first define what we mean by “church.” The church is the community of all Christians throughout history who have been loved and saved by Jesus Christ,<sup>1</sup> including the believing people of the Old Testament.<sup>2</sup> In every church, there are people who are not Christians,<sup>3</sup> including both lost people and wolves sent by Satan to lead people astray.<sup>4</sup> While it is possible for Christians to know who else is a Christian (e.g., those people who use frequent references to Christian brothers and sisters), ultimately only the Lord knows exactly who is and is not a Christian.<sup>5</sup> In this sense, “church” refers to every person of any age, race, and culture whose sins are forgiven through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ; this is commonly called the “universal church.”

The various congregations of the universal church that meet together for such things as teaching, fellowship, and worship are commonly called the “local church.”<sup>6</sup> In fact, many of the letters in the New Testament were written to help inform and direct the local churches of such cities as Philippi, Corinth, Ephesus, Colossae, and Thessalonica. Both the Old and New Testaments were written to communities of

1. Acts 20:28; Eph. 5:25.

2. Deut. 4:10; Acts 7:38; Heb. 2:12, cf. Ps. 22:22.

3. Matt. 13:24–30.

4. Acts 20:29–30.

5. 2 Tim. 2:19.

6. For example, see Heb. 10:25.

God's people who regularly gathered together for such meetings, to help inform and direct their lives together as the family of God on mission to see Jesus transform their cities. The Bible is clear that every Christian is a part of the larger church body and is expected to participate in the life of a local church with the gift(s) God has given him or her. This is so that God may be glorified and so his people may be built up through their service to one another.<sup>7</sup> It is therefore a sin for someone who claims to be a Christian to not be actively loving his or her Christian brothers and sisters<sup>8</sup> and seeking to build up the church as faithful members of a church.<sup>9</sup>

The Scriptures are clear that Jesus Christ is the head of the church.<sup>10</sup> Jesus is the Apostle who plants a church.<sup>11</sup> Jesus is the Leader who builds the church.<sup>12</sup> Jesus is the Senior Pastor and Chief Shepherd who rules the church.<sup>13</sup> And it is ultimately Jesus who closes churches down when they have become faithless or fruitless.<sup>14</sup> Therefore, it is absolutely vital that a church loves Jesus, obeys Jesus, imitates Jesus, and follows Jesus at all times and in all ways, according to the teaching of his Word.<sup>15</sup>

Human leadership in the church is little more than qualified Christians who are following Jesus and encouraging other people to follow them as they follow Jesus. Because of this, church leaders must be good sheep who follow their Chief Shepherd Jesus well before they are fit to be shepherds leading any of his sheep. This is in large part what Paul meant when he told Christians in various local churches to “be imita-

7. 1 Cor. 12:1–31.

8. 1 John 1:7; 3:17–18; 4:21.

9. 1 Cor. 12:7; 14:6, 12, 26b.

10. Eph. 1:9, 22–23; 4:15; 5:23.

11. Heb. 3:1.

12. Matt. 16:18.

13. 1 Pet. 5:4.

14. Rev. 2:5.

15. Col. 3:16.

tors of me, as I am of Christ.”<sup>16</sup> While it may seem obvious to insist that any discussion of church leadership begin with the centrality and preeminence of Jesus, sadly, many churches omit him from their organizational charts altogether. At the risk of stating the obvious, every church must place Jesus Christ in the position of highest authority and devotion in both the organizational chart and the life of the church.

Serving under Jesus are elders, deacons, and church members. Philippians 1:1 illustrates this church leadership structure: “Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi, with the overseers and deacons.” Packed in this verse we discover the three kinds of leaders who take responsibility for the health and progress of the local church. We will spend some time investigating each of their roles. First, there are elders (“overseers” in this verse), who are the senior leadership in the church. Second, there are deacons, who function as pastoral assistants by also leading the church alongside the elders. Third, there are “saints,” or Christians, who love God and help lead the local church by using their resources (time, talent, and treasure) to help build up their church as church members. In the remainder of this book we will examine each of these groupings as well as the role of women in local church leadership.

16. 1 Cor. 11:1.