

The Nature of the Church

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Acts chapter number 2, and we'll read verse 38 to verse number 47.

Then Peter said to them, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call." And with many other words he testified and exhorted them, saying, "Be saved from this perverse generation." Then those who gladly received his word were baptized, and that day about three thousand souls were added to them. And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers. Then fear came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles. Now all who believed were together and had all things in common, and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need. So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.

Father, we ask that You would speak to us now through Your word, that we would understand what it is that You would have us to do and to be as the Church of the Living God, and we ask this in Jesus' name, Amen.

It's my desire over the next two weeks to share with you some truths about the church—essential truths about the life and the nature of the church. How she is to function, which we'll look at more so next week, but this week more or less who she is to be. And in this passage of Scripture, we have the context of the disciples being commissioned by our Lord, waiting in the upper room for the coming of the Holy Spirit. And the Holy Spirit in chapter 2, verse 4, descended upon them, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and God demonstrated mighty works and power among them. And Peter, in that very context, stands up and he begins to proclaim the truth of Jesus, saying what you're seeing here today is a direct result of the power of that gospel that saves and the promise of the Holy Spirit that was sent down from heaven in accordance with what our Lord Jesus Christ had

said previously. In fact, this is not just what our Lord said; this is what the prophet said. Joel himself testified of these things, and it's in this context that we find that the 120 disciples that were there in the upper room now become 3120, following the sermon of Peter, because 3000 souls were pricked to the heart and cried out, "Men and brethren, what must I do to be saved?" And Peter, unashamedly, boldly says, "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." And so these people gladly received the word of the Lord, and they were baptized, and they were added to that number of disciples there in the upper room. This is the first indication to us, following Pentecost, of the New Testament Church.

And we find in this passage of Scripture some things that are very, very important for understanding the nature of the church, and what we must begin with understanding is that this passage is written historically in a narrative form. And what I mean by that is this is not an epistle where Paul is simply saying, "Now do this, and do that, and do this, and do that." Luke is recounting to us what took place as a result of the coming of the Holy Spirit and as a result of the powerful preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ, and he's allowing us to see what was happening there in the early church, to hover over, as it were, and look down, as it were, from a helicopter view and see what was taking place there in the life of this church. Who were these people? What were they like? What was the manner in which they gathered together? What was the attitude that possessed them? What were the things that they did together? And we then, therefore, must come to this text of Scripture understanding that, yes, there is a pattern here for us, but also we must never forget that this is the pattern that came as a result. Not the result of human effort, but the result of the demonstration of the Spirit and of power through the preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

For the last thing that we would ever want to do is approach a passage like this and become mechanical about it all. But here we have the nature of the church, the essential qualities that marked the early church, that should mark the church in all her generations. The church as she should be. In her pattern, we see that there in verse 42. The church did things. It wasn't just a called-out assembly. You can have a called-out assembly at a football club. You can have a called-out assembly at a golf club. You've got a called-out assembly of women gathering with their children from a mother's club. But this was a definable body of those who gladly received the word and were baptized, and they believed some things, and they did some things as they got together. And therefore, we see a pattern of what the church did, and what we should continue to do.

But not only do we see a pattern, we see also the life and power of the church. Not only what she did, but the spirit in which she did it. So that

when we come to a passage of this, we're not just coming at it just cold and dry, mechanically saying, "Oh, they did this, they did that, they did that," and that's it, we just apply it here like that, and that's it. These people were filled with the Holy Spirit. There was an atmosphere in which they were operating that was evident as a result of the power of the gospel and the work of the Holy Spirit. And so when we come to a passage like this, a passage like this, we must avoid two main pitfalls.

The first pitfall that we must avoid is pursuing the pattern apart from the power. That is, as I said, to make mechanical application of a text like this. To simply think that if we do these things, then we are pleasing in God's sight by reason of the fact that we just do them. We can emphasize form, we can emphasize arrangement, and we can do all that apart from the life that is described in this text here. But the nature of the church is more than just what she does in her pattern; it is who she is by reason of what God did to her. By giving her life, by purchasing her with His blood, by raising her from the dead.

Let me illustrate. You could gather together the best architects in the world, and you could gather together the best craftsmen in the world, and set before them a project of making a statue after the image of the monarch. And you could give to their disposal all the money that they want, all the tools, all the things that they need to create an image of the monarch. Accurate, precise, exact lookalike image. And they can set to work in carving and sculpting and making this image to look exactly like the monarch. But you and I know that that image will be no match for the living monarch. It may reflect the monarch in form, but you cannot say that it has the nature of the monarch properly represented. The soul of the monarch is missing. The life of the living is not there.

If you've ever seen a deceased person that you've known and have been close to, it's the same. You know that the person before you in that casket is indeed that person that you once knew. But you probably said to yourself, as I've said to myself, "It's not the same." You know, seeing, as it were, the body for the last time is not the same as if you saw them before they passed away. Because part of that person is their life. An essential nature to that person is the fact that they are living and have life. And it's the same is true of the Church of God. That you have all the pattern and have all the form and have everything organized in such a way that she appears to be what she should be, but without the life, she fails to be what she should be.

And so, as just as God formed Adam, as it were, out of the dust of the earth, Adam was not Adam until God breathed into his nostrils, and he became a living soul. And so we find here that the things that are transpiring in chapter 42 are transpiring because God breathed into those nostrils life.

When they cried, "What must we do to be saved?" And they were risen and alive, and this is what their life looked like.

And the second pitfall that we must be avoiding this morning is to think that because we have life, there is no need for form. There are many Christians that would extrapolate from this text all the emotional elements of the text, all the things that show the enthusiasm of the text, but fail to place emphasis also upon the things that the church is to do. And therefore, they rob the church of what she should be in doctrine, in fellowship, in breaking of bread, and in prayers. For many Christians, these are nonconsequential, not important things. As long as there's life and activity, as long as there's happiness, and as long as there's things happening, then it's fine. But God cares about doctrine; He cares about fellowship; He cares about breaking of bread; He cares about praying. And so it's important for us to not fall into either one of these pitfalls because you do not have a church if the church does not break bread. You do not have a church if you do not have the truth of the gospel and right doctrine. There are many a cult that can run and display, but they are no true Church of God, for they have not true gospel doctrine. There are many people that can gather together and do things, but as I said, if they do not do what the scripture commands them to do, then they are no church at all.

Now, this month is the month of January, and many churches like to have Vision Sunday. I'm not a guy for Vision Sunday; to me it just smells like a CEO trying to stir up a dead business. But anyhow, that's my take on it. Vision Sunday is where a pastor might come to a church and say, "This year, we're focusing on this theme: wisdom. This year, we're focusing on this theme: giving." And they turn the emphasis of the church toward that thing for the year, and therefore they try to stir up people towards that. The problem with Vision Sunday is tunnel vision, and the problem with tunnel vision is that you lose sight of the peripheral, and you have one focus. But here, you'll find in this passage of scripture what the vision of the church should always be, and it's broad. It includes praying; it includes doctrine; it includes fellowship; it includes breaking of bread. I could not imagine a mega-church pastor getting up there and saying, "This Vision Sunday is the breaking of bread." Probably won't go down too well with the congregation.

What I'm simply trying to say here is what we have in this scripture of text is a vision for Christ's church, and that all these things are to be emphasized together. All these things are to be pursued together in the life of the church, and not one to the expense of the other.

As we look at these texts together, there are two main considerations that I want us to consider to challenge us this morning, and that is simply this: Are we committed to the things that the people in this passage were com-

mitted to? And do we know the vitality and the life that marked these early Christians there at the day of Pentecost?

Let us look together more focussly on verse number 42. Let's look at the life marks of the early church, and it says in verse 42, "And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and in fellowship, in breaking of bread, and in prayers." What marks the life of this early church? What was the nature of this church? Well, immediately we're confronted with the words "and they continued steadfastly." This word appears again in verse number 46, translated as "so continuing daily with one accord," or "continuing daily." Both are in the present tense, meaning both are talking about a continuing to continue in these very things. Meaning that they were marked by a pursuit of these things, and there was a certain commitment that marked the church here in this passage, revealed to us by these words "and they continued steadfastly." They were not haphazard about what they were doing. They were not careless or indifferent or unconcerned about living out the way that God had called them to live. These people were pursuing these very things and continuing daily in them, and they were pursuing it with every fiber of their being, knowing that this was the things that pleased the Lord, and they did this voluntarily. They were not forced to do it. They were not guilt-tripped into doing it. They had both discipline that was fueled by desire. You see, they had tasted of the goodness of God and the remission of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit, and they were compelled by such gospel love and spirit word that they went on in the power of that new life, and nothing could stop them voluntarily.

When Jesus said to them, as the disciples of Jesus said to His disciples and to all those that wanted to follow Him, that He laid demands on them to follow Him with everything that they got, basically. You know, "to the foxes have holes, birds of the air have nests, and the Son of Man has nowhere to lay," He said, He demands, as it were, from His followers, total allegiance to Christ as Lord. And you see that right here in this passage. A group of people that were committed to Christ and His church. You see, this commitment was voluntary, but it was not only voluntary; it was not private and personal, but it was communal.

I think our generation has been riddled with wrong thinking about the relationship between Christ and His church. You see, commitment to Christ must translate into commitment to Christ's body. All the things here that God calls His people to do are to be done in the community of the Saints. How is it that you can have fellowship alone? How is it that you come to hear the apostles' doctrine and teaching unless you gather with a place of the word is being taught? How is it that you should pray, not privately, is here talking about the prayers, the prayers of God's people gathered together and worshipping the Lord together? You see, the emphasis here is

that they were doing these things together. Yes, you can do all these things privately, but that's not the emphasis; it says "and they continued with one accord," and "they," and "they," all the way through the text, because they realized it would be part of to be committed to Christ meant to be committed to Christ's body, the church. You cannot love Christ unless you love His bride, and it is a total fallacy to think that we can live in obedience to God apart from being involved in the church of Jesus Christ and be committed to God's people. How can you fulfill the commandments that are given to us in the epistles of the New Testament regarding the one another's unless you are around one another and committed to one another? The church of Jesus Christ is to be a body, as we look at next week, but it is filled with them, and they were committed to the Lord, expressed in their commitment to one another.

What were they committed to? Well, verse 42 tells us, "and they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine." This is first; this is essential. I think this is first and foremost; it was central to all they did. You see, it was the apostles' doctrine that brought them to saving faith. Peter himself preached the gospel of salvation through Jesus Christ. That was the word that they gladly received, but they did not stop receiving that word upon their conversion, but they continued to come to that fountain and drink from the Word of God week in, day in, day out as they heard the word of the apostles, as they reciprocated the word of the apostles amongst each other by communicating and fellowshiping one with another, and as they continued on, sitting under the preached Word of God, they were committed to the truth. Not only the truth in terms of content, but they were committed to the truth also in terms of proclamation. They were Christians that gathered together to hear God's Word, and they believed something about God's Word. They believed it to be true; they held to the truth of what the apostles taught, and the apostles' teaching is none other than the Word of God, and so in many ways, as long as the Word of God is rightly expounded and taught, there you hear the apostles' doctrine, there you hear the word of truth, and there the believers of every generation should be found committed under, sitting under, learning under, applying themselves to. They were committed to the apostles' doctrine.

Church to them and preaching to them was not about oratory or eloquence; they had an attitude of "speak, O Lord, as we come to you to receive the food of your holy Word." They wanted to hear the voice of that chief shepherd who said, "My sheep hear my voice, and they follow me." They wanted to hear, through the preached Word, through the Word of God proclaimed, the voice of Christ. They had a desire and a hunger for the Word, as newborn babes desire the sincere milk of the Word, that they might grow thereby.

But secondly, we have in this passage, not only did they pursue and com-

mit themselves to the apostles' doctrine, but to fellowship. I think this is good that it is in the sense second to doctrine because there is no true fellowship without doctrine. In a world today where the ecumenical spirit is broad and wide, that it doesn't matter what you believe as long as we live in peace. Where we say it doesn't matter what religion you belong to as long as you believe in God, and we have fellowship one with another as long as we can hang out with each other. But here, the passage of scripture tells us that they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and in fellowship because there was no fellowship apart from the truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ. In fact, it was that gospel that brought them into fellowship. These people did not have fellowship prior to the fact of the gospel. Their fellowship was centered around the gospel of Jesus Christ.

John says this to us in 1 John 1:3, "That which we have seen and heard we declare unto you, or we announce unto you." What did you have seen and heard? "We heard and we saw Christ, and we declare Him unto you." Listen to this, "that you also may have fellowship with us, and truly our fellowship, you and us, is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ." He's simply saying, "We declare unto you this Jesus in order that you might have fellowship with us because there is no fellowship with us apart from Jesus because our fellowship is with the Father and with the Son Jesus Christ, and if someone preaches another gospel and another God and another Jesus, we have no part and fellowship with them." So our fellowship is built upon the apostles' doctrine.

This attitude of "doctrine divides, and therefore it is unimportant" is detrimental to the life of the church. Of course, there are things that we should prioritize over other things, but everything God says is important, and God's people should have convictions about the truth of the gospel and of His word. But fellowship was communion. You see, in fellowship today, we think of socializing and glib, lighthearted chatter, and although this is good for God's people to speak in such a manner and to build friendships even on and in an earthly way, as it were, this is not exactly what fellowship refers to. Fellowship is communion. It is really the integrating of God's, the hearts of God's people together as one body, whereby they care for one another, love one another, and are seeking to edify one another.

I think that's an important word to understand when we think of fellowship, is that it is for edification, and edification means to build up one another, and therefore fellowship is about that bond of love, that relationship but whereby we contribute and partner with one another in conforming one another to the image of Jesus Christ. Therefore, fellowship is about that bond of love that relationship but whereby we contribute and partner with one another in conforming one another to the image of Jesus Christ. Therefore, fellowship is centered upon the truth of God. It is centered upon our rela-

tionship both to the Word of God because you commune with Christ and I commune with Christ, therefore we can commune with one another in light of Christ and His truth. That's fellowship. It's provoking one another to love and to good works. It's the shoulder that someone cries on, that when they're going through a hard time, that brother or sister can comfort them with the truth of God. It's that ear that can be lent to that person who needs advice and needs counsel. It's that person who gets alongside that one and says, "What can I pray for you this week, brother or sister in Christ?" because you have needs and I have needs, and how is it that I can be invested in your life and partner with you together in your sanctification and partner with you together in your knowledge and growth of your knowledge of Jesus Christ and your growth in the truth. Fellowship is about accountability. Fellowship should shape you. It's iron that sharpens iron. It is what makes us continue on. It's like those coals that continue to let the fire rub off onto the others so that they continue on in strength and to go on in encouragement.

Fellowship then is about participation. It wasn't merely just the occupying of their lives for 15 hours of the week on a Sunday morning. You read this passage, and you don't see that. What's happening to these people? They're invested in each other's lives. They're sharers in each other's lives, and for many people today, church has just been something that you come to on a Sunday morning for one and a half hours, and yes, you have fellowship here—I'm not undermining that—and yes, you hear the word here, and it's very important and vital, but being part of the church of Jesus Christ is much more than just darkening the door of a church every Sunday. Fellowship invades our privacy. We don't like it. See, when you're alone, you can have fellowship with yourself. As soon as there's someone else, you know, feel a little bit uncomfortable. If I'm around them, what if they ask me that question? What if they said to me, "What have you been reading this week, brother or sister in Christ?" "I haven't opened my Bible a week, and I don't want to confess that I haven't." It's better to find a place somewhere in the corner where no one will see me.

Fellowship is about hospitality, and I'm not just talking about an open home, which is a very major part of hospitality, but I'm also talking about an open heart. Some of us don't have homes we can meet in due to the fact that we live with other family members, etc., but you can still show hospitality by being friendly and getting around people and having them over at a coffee shop for a coffee or catching up with them in a park and praying or sharing whatever it may be. You can show hospitality by making a meal for someone, by praying for someone, by sending a text to someone. It's the open heart of the people of God that invites everyone in, and the church was marked by this daily, marked by this.

And then you see that they broke bread. What's that got to do with the life and vigor of the church? It's got everything to do with it because as they gather together week by week and remember the Lord Jesus Christ, who said, "This is my body which is broken for you. This is my blood which was shed for you," they remembered the very lifeblood that brought them together as a body. They remembered the very purpose for which they gather. They remember the very reason why they have life. They remember the very reason for their hope that is to come. It was all found in the breaking of the bread, where Christ was exalted, and they were worshiping Him together as one bread and one body. And so they broke bread all together, communing with Christ in remembrance of Him.

And then they prayed together. Prayer was done corporately, as was done this morning, and I hope when you hear me pray from the pulpit that you are praying with me, saying, "Yes, Lord, grant it. Lord, may it be. Lord, help us. Lord, thank you," Lord, that you realize that this is a call to pray together in worship of our God, in adoration of Him, and in beseeching Him together. But not only did they pray together when they gathered together on the Lord's Day to worship Him, but they also prayed together, and when they had fellowship one with another, prayer filled the places where they gathered. They weren't just gathering together and talking as if they weren't in the presence of God. They knew that they were in the presence of God, even in their fellowship, and so it wasn't strange, awkward, or uncommon to say, "Let's pray. We've been talking about this troubling thing in your life; let's pray. We've been fellowshiping and talking about the Word of God; let's pray that God will help us." And they gather together, not only in private and personally, they gather together corporately, but also they prayed together in such a way that they around their meals and times and fellowships and everywhere they'll go, they'll marked by prayer.

You see, they were marked by these things; they continued in these things. I mean, a beautiful picture of this is what happens when Peter is in prison in Acts chapter 12 for preaching the gospel. And I love the commentary on this passage by Luke. He says, "Peter was therefore kept in prison." What would you hear if someone was in prison? What would you think you would do? Listen to what the church did. But constant prayer was offered to God for him by the church. And that wasn't just even privately, although they did pray privately in their homes, they were together in the house praying together all through the night for Peter's release, and they prayed through, and God honored that, and there was a release. And so here we find in this passage of Scripture that Peter was kept in prison, but constant prayer was offered to God for him by the church. And therefore, we find that this church was a praying church. They were committed to praying. They had big views of God. They knew God was able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that they could ask or think, according to the power that worked

within them, so they prayed and beseeched this God that He would show forth His arm and work among them.

And these are the things that the church did, which marked the nature of the church. But I want you to notice briefly in verses 44 to 47, just some key words that tell us of the nature of the church with regards to its life. We've looked at the concept of them being committed, and yes, committed to these things which shaped their pattern, but notice the atmosphere of the church. Notice the exuberance of God's people in these passages. Verse 44, "Now all who believed were together and had all things in common." Straight away, you think of them having all things in common is that concept even of fellowship that extends beyond just the communication of our words but even the communication of our goods, according to those that have need. And so they shared in the things that belong to them. And what we see there is this was unity. They were united together. They wept with those who wept; they rejoiced with those who rejoiced, and they felt the needs of those around them, and they thought, "Well, let's try and relieve these needs best we can." And they were willing to part with some of the extras that they had and feel the pinch in their own lives that others may be benefited. There was great unity in the church.

Verse 45, look what it says here, verse 45, "And sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need." Once again, here is a unity of sharing in things, but also we see that that was done because of there was sacrifice, and that there was generosity. Now, before you think that this is a cultish call to sell everything you have and give it to Camden Valley Baptist Church, this is not the case. What happens in this passage is the very—it says that they did so property, and they did sell possessions so that the needs of people might be met, but realize that just lay it down, they still meet in house to houses, so this in all the houses were sold. The point is that Luke is trying to—to point out here is not Christian communism; he's trying to demonstrate to us that the love of God that was shared abroad in these hearts of these people and the joy that resulted as the power of the gospel in their life, that nothing that they held was dear to them, but they were willing to part with anything that God pressed upon their heart to part with so that others may be benefited. Why? Because committed to the Lord and to this church. And that we should never lose the church of God, no matter of the abuses of the cults, no matter of the abuses of this text of scripture, we must realize and still hold all things in common as God's people and not say that anything that we have is our own with regards to the fact that, you know, it is—it belongs to you by reason of the fact that ultimately belongs to the Lord. And as one man said, "You hold loosely what God gives to you, hold with an open hand of things God gives to you." But this was an attitude of sacrifice, of generosity.

And look at verse 46, "So continuing daily with one accord," is that unity again, "in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food." Listen to this word, "with gladness and simplicity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people." Listen to those words here. They ate their food with gladness, simplicity of heart, praising God, praising God. Imagine walking into the house of one of these people there and walking into one of their fellowship nights where they're just talking about the Lord and eating and fellowshiping. He says when you walk in there, the atmosphere of praise, the spirit of rejoicing, the spirit of thanksgiving, the spirit of simplicity of heart, singleness of heart, focused on the Lord, loving one another. These people were caught up in enrapturing God and they could not help but praise Him for His mercy and for His grace, and it marked their meetings by rejoicing and praising of God. Did you see what God did for me this week, brother? Let me show you the goodness of God in this passage of scripture. Rejoice with me in the promises. Pray with me. Let's thank God together. Let's rejoice together, even as we eat our bread. Amazing, this church, what we're led into, what we see, marked by joy, marked by unity, marked by sacrifice.

You look at this and you think, as I think of myself and say, "Lord, why do we lack these things in our lives? What could potentially be the reason for why it is that, yes, we know some of this, no doubt about that. I speak to your praise, that as a church, that these things I can see evident in our life and in our midst, and I rejoice with many of you. We rejoice together in fellowship with one another." So do not speak this to your condemnation but to your praise. But if you are honest with yourself, as I am with myself, I ask, "Lord, it is not like they were, and what are some of the reasons therefore then why you and I might lack some of these things?"

Well, the first bold and confronting reason is the matter of conversion. You see, this passage of scripture is set right in the context of the gospel of Jesus Christ proclaimed in the power of the Holy Spirit to a people that gladly received His word and were baptized, to a people that were pricked to their hearts and said, "Lord, what must I do to be saved?" These people tasted of the remission of sins, and these people tasted of the grace of God's Holy Spirit in their lives. They were regenerated; they were converted, and therefore that very gospel grace compelled them to live as they lived. No one was forcing their hand, saying, "Rejoice in the Lord right now, you're done." You know, this was just happening as a result of the power of the Holy Spirit coming upon those who believed in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

And much of the dullness that exists in many of the churches today, and maybe perhaps in your own heart this morning, and indifference to the Church of God, to the Word of God, to the breaking of bread, to fellowship, and to prayers, do not put it past yourself, brother and sister, that you may

be outside of the kingdom of God. That if communing with Christ has no value to you, if the Word of God means nothing to you, if you are indifferent to praying, and if you are indifferent to all the things that are found in this text of scripture, ask yourself, "Have I repented for the remission of sins and received the Holy Spirit?" That's an honest question that we have to ask ourselves. Where did their life come from? Obviously, you can't create life for yourself. God breathed life into them. But for some of us, and others of us, it might be the fact that we have just lost our confidence in the authority of scripture. We read a passage like this, and we think, "Oh well, you know what, yeah, that's good, but times have changed. This is outdated. Like, you really want people to open their houses? They do this because they were Jews, and all these kind of things. And do you really want us to show hospitality? That was just a cultural thing. This is just merely archaic. I mean, you know, parting with your goods? I mean, you know, and helping and sharing and looking after each other's needs, really? This Christ will demand that of us?"

Maybe when we come to look at what the church should be, we look to other places, like to other churches, and not to the Word of God itself, and ask ourselves, "Do we have these things in our lives?" And so, our loss of confidence in the authority of scripture can drive us to think of the church in ways that God doesn't want us to think of the church, and then cause us to not apply ourselves in obedience to the Word of God.

For others, it could be a matter of past hurt. You know, there are many new believers that have come to Christ that have been part of good biblical churches, and even part of churches that aren't so good in biblical, but they thought they were at the beginning, and they've been hurt—hurt by other Christians, hurt by ministers and pastors, hurt by the corruption of money-hungry, power-hungry people—and they think to themselves, "Surely then, this, we don't need to be part of the church. The church is full of corruption." And therefore, they look at a passage like this and say, "Ah, you know, these guys, they're just new Christians. They haven't caught on yet what really happens in churches. Wait till Acts, midway down the book, and you'll see what happens to them." And some people, due to past hurt and abusive authority and other—all these things—simply think that commitment is just a waste of time. It's like putting your money in a bag without—with holes, and it just falls through. A waste of time, it's empty, and therefore they say, "It's better to sit on the fringes than to get involved and get your hands dirty in the work, at the rub shoulders and fellowship with God's people." There are many, many countless Christians that are in that position this morning, that are not being obedient, first of all, to the text of Scripture here, but second of all, they lose out on all the blessings that are to be found in a church community whereby we become vulnerable to one another as we love God together and serve the Lord together.

If there's the Apostles' doctrine, if there's fellowship, if there's breaking of bread, if there's prayers, if there's life in the church, then what's the matter? God has designed this for His people. And lastly, it may be due to sin. You know, each of these things in this passage of Scripture exposes us. The Apostles' doctrine exposes us. Fellowship exposes us. The breaking of bread exposes us because we remember His death; we remember our sin. Praying exposes us—exposes our coldness of heart and our deadness of heart—and how we do not draw near to God. And for many a times, it's just because of besetting sin in our lives that we fail to confront one another, be with one another, fellowship with another, hear the Word of God, because we're holding a little idol somewhere in the corner of our hearts that we do not want to tear down. And there are many people in God's churches due to sin and not wanting to be confronted in sin, or even wanting to be helped in their sin, will stand on the edges and the fringes of God's people and not enter into the fellowship of the saints because they do not want to be exposed. I'm not talking about public exposure like your name's gonna be called out from the pulpit. I'm just talking about the fact that I don't want no one to know about their pet sin.

My brother and sister in Christ, Galatians 6:1 talks about the fact that we need one another to restore one another when we're in besetting sin. We need accountability as part of the fact of our growth. We don't do Christianity alone. God never intended for us to do Christianity alone; He intended us to be a church gathered together to do Christianity together. And you rob yourself of the joy of being restored to God. And I'm not saying you can't be restored without the help of others. I'm just simply saying there are times we're beset and in a ditch, and we need someone to reach out their hand as they bro, "Got you here. Don't worry. I'm praying for you. I'm checking on you each day of the week until you get through this problem." Someone needs a sister who will call them and say, "I know you're battling with this week after week," and—and this is the job of the whole church to do—to warn the unruly, to comfort the feeble-minded, to support the weak, and to be patient with all. This is not about high-horse Phariseism whereby we set ourselves up on a pedestal and judge one another about who's going to make it first to the kingdom of God. We have people that are saved by grace through faith, all of us. And as Luther said, "I want to be part of the church of the broken, those that know that they are sinners before God, not in a church where everyone thinks that they're a saint," it means in the Catholic sense of saint.

And it's important for us to realize that we need one another in the Church of God. And so, in closing, how is your view of the church this morning? What do you prioritize for Camden Valley Baptist Church? What is it that is your vision for the church? Is it the pursuit of preaching, and that God's

people will embrace it more and apply it more and see that work of grace worked out in their lives through the word of truth and sanctified by it? Is it that we would deepen in our fellowship one with another, or are you thinking of just keeping to holding people at arm's length? Is it for edification the church, or is it for your personal gratification? What do you think of the Lord's Supper? A traditional thing that the more we push it out and do it once a month, and then maybe once a year, whatever it is, and just every now and again, "Will be fine. Just come back and do this in remembrance of me." And what's going is that how you feel the Lord's Supper? Do you see how it's central to the life of the church, something to be pursued by the Lord's people? They continued steadfastly in that very thing. What about praying? Are we praying people? Do we see the need for prayer, the necessity of prayer, the power of prayer? You see, the church is a temple of God, and Jesus said, "My temple, this temple shall be called a house of prayer." And therefore, the church will be marked by prayer. These are things that we pursue. Are these the things that we love? Are these the things that we want to see advance further and further through the church? These are marks of the life and nature of the church, essential marks that should always be held before us.

Maybe this morning, you look at a passage like this and say, "Lord, fill me with Your Spirit. I don't understand. I need this. I've tasted it. I know I'm a believer, but somewhere along the line, I've moved away from this. Lord, fill me with Your Spirit. Pour out Your Spirit upon me like You did on the day of Pentecost, that I might be refreshed and renewed in my love and zeal for You and for Your church and for Your people."

Let us pray.