

Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

Fellowship in the Church

Scripture: Selected Scriptures

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Well let's talk about life in the church this morning a little bit. We want to talk about fellowship a little bit this morning and you know when you're asked to sort of speak on church life and talk about it from one perspective, just one message it's a little bit hard because we live our whole life in the church. The whole issue of the life of the church is huge and all over the pages of the New Testament, of course. But because of our limitation I just want to talk about life in the church from the standpoint of fellowship because I really think that's the key to understand the church. The church is a fellowship. It is not a human institution, it is not a human organization, it is shared life.

The true and living church as I was trying to point out on that television talk show is made of people who are connected to Jesus Christ, who share His life, who follow His leadership. He is the head; we are the body. We are a mutual ministry. We serve one another. We serve the will of our honored Lord and the head of the body of Jesus Christ.

So if you could define the church you certainly wouldn't define it as an institution. That's not true. You wouldn't define it as an earthly organization. You wouldn't define the true church as a human structure at all. The true church is an organism not an organization. It is shared life. It is the common life, the life of God, eternal life that we all possess through faith in Christ and by the wonderful work of the Holy Spirit who has made us alive with the very life of God. We share common life. We are a fellowship.

Now the question of course comes what does this mean to us. How precious is it? How well do we understand this? Today you know church is viewed pretty much I think as a spectator event. You come, you sit, you watch what happens here and then you go. That is the worst way to view the church. What happens here is the worshipping church and the church being taught, this is to stimulate the real life of the church which goes on in its greatest measure after this event has taken place. I think that sometimes we forget the responsibility of fellowship. I think sometimes we forget the essence of mutual shared life. Although it's harder to do here because we're so highly engaged in it than it is in many, many other places.

I was reading an article this week, just to illustrate it, on the new wave in the entrepreneurial church where everybody gets to invent his own church. It is called the emerging church. And by the word emerging they are confessing, they're not sure what is true, it's very post-modern, they're not sure what is true, they're not sure they have any doctrine. They're not even sure what the gospel is.

They're not sure what the Bible means by what it says. They're pretty sure that they don't know what it means by what it says but can you imagine these churches are some what large and 5,000 gather around the fact that they don't know what the Bible means by what it says, aren't sure what the gospel is. You say well what do they do when they get together? Well one structure, and I read this yesterday, when they come together they tell people now while all this stuff is going on and of course it primarily reduces itself to music and it's music from the culture, while all this music is going on feel free to come, go, get something to drink, make your cell phone calls, just meander around. We're just all sort of happening here. That's the new wave. And the magazine that wrote the article, Christianity Today, was applauding this wonderful, new, sense of liberation as a better option than a lot of others, namely the traditional structured church.

It's hard to imagine a church without any structure since the Bible says, "Let everything be done decently and in order." Among other things, God is a God of amazing structure and consistency and pattern. But nonetheless it simply illustrates the point that the church today is so amorphous that going from place to place that you would probably find very little commonality in all the experience you have. And everybody defines it in a different way. This new emerging church is the church of ultimate indifference. Just meander around, do whatever you want, make your own phone calls, wander over here, get something to eat, talk, do whatever you want; it really isn't important that you listen to us as if we had something to say. That sort of has the seeds of its' own decline built in, doesn't it?

Are we missing something here? Isn't there something really structural about the church and the answer to the question is absolutely. Absolutely. The church is a body and the body is God's analogous way to define the structure of the church. It is true we are sometimes called a flock with a great shepherd. We are called a building, a temple of God in which the spirit dwells. We are called a family with God as our head and Jesus, as it were, as our supernatural older brother, our joint heir. He's not ashamed to call us brothers. We are also viewed in the Bible as branches on a vine. That's all true of the church. That is also all true of Israel; you find all those same metaphors concerning Israel. There's one metaphor for the church you never find connecting Israel to God that's the body metaphor. That's why I read 1 Corinthians - that's unique to the church. So Israel is the flock; God is the shepherd. Israel is a family and God is the Father. Israel is branches and God is the vine. Israel is a building, as it were, a household and God is the indwelling one. Those things you find of Israel. But the church's unique identity is this metaphor, this analogy to a human body that I read in 1 Corinthians 12. And the essence of that is the word fellowship; it is mutual shared life. It's organic. Everybody's in. There aren't any frozen parts out there in the lab waiting to be transplanted. This is a breathing, living, moving organism. And that is defining for the life of the church.

Just to kind of help you get into that idea a little bit, in the gray dawn of an April day in 1945 in the Nazi concentration camp at Flossenburgin Germany a man, a pastor by the name of Dietrich Bonhoeffer was executed. He was executed under the orders of Himmler who was Hitler's

executioner. Bonhoeffer had been in prison for a period of two years. He'd been everywhere from Tagleto Berlin to Bukenvoldto Schoenberg and finally ended up in Flossenburg where he lost his life. And as he was moved along during those two years he was more and more and more isolated from any Christian fellowship which was so important and so precious to him. He wrote a book in the process of all that experience which is with us even today, translated into English called "Life Together". And in that book he says this, "The physical presence of other Christians is a source of incomprehensible joy and strength to the believer. Longingly the imprisoned apostle Paul calls his dearly beloved son and the faith Timothy to come to him in prison in the last days of his life. He would see him again and have him near. Paul has not forgotten the tears that Timothy shed when last they parted. And remembering the congregation in Thessalonica Paul prays night and day exceedingly that we might see your face in the age of John knows that his joy will not be full until he can come to his own people and speak face to face instead of writing them with pen and ink." And Bonhoeffer they understood the richness of fellowship.

"The prisoner," he writes, "the sick person, the Christian in exile sees the companionship of a fellow Christian a physical sign of the gracious presence of the triune God. And it's true. When we receive another believer, when we meet with other believers he writes, "it's as though one meets with the Lord. They receive each others benedictions as benedictions of the Lord Jesus Christ." Bonhoeffer says, "It is an unspeakable gift of God for the lonely individual to have Christian companionship but easily disregarded and trodden underfoot by those who have the gift everyday. Therefore let him whom until now has had the privilege of living a common Christian life with other Christians praise God's grace from the bottom of his heart." See Bonhoeffer was stealing the pain of that isolation and separation then he began to fully understand the value of Christian fellowship.

Bonhoeffer then concludes this little section, "Let him thank God on his knees and declare it is nothing but grace that we are allowed to live in community with Christian brethren." I mean I hope we all don't have to get to the point where we're completely separated from that to appreciate it. Fellowship is a precious, precious gift. It is really the defining element in the life of the church. That's why I don't understand people who aren't together whenever the saints come. I don't understand the hit and miss, come now, come then, come later, you know.

I met a guy the other day and I asked him if he was Christian. He said yeah I'm a Christian but I'm a CE Christian. I said what's that. He said Christmas/ Easter. And I said with all do respect sir, I question whether you're a Christian at all even on Christmas and Easter. You're a part of the fellowship. The true church is one body and all the members of that body are members of each other. And every member serves a purpose and has a function. And a responsibility to the rest. And I think that's why you got to get to the body metaphor. I mean there's certain things that are instructive about the bride and the bridegroom metaphor, another picture of the church also true of Israel. There's instruction about the vine and the branches. There's instruction that comes out of the flock and the shepherd and the building and the family. All of those things are instructive to us but I

think the thing that's the most helpful is to understand that the church is this fellowship of living life, living organic, spiritual life. This is our unique identity.

Now as a kid I grew up and churches had - a time when churches had a place called fellowship hall. Remember that? Fellowship hall. And my view of fellowship was little old ladies serving red punch and cookies. Really I thought that was it. and some tile floor and some metal chairs and you bang them around and you have punch and cookies and that's fellowship. So I had to be deprogrammed coming out of that as to the essence of what fellowship really was. It's much deeper than that. It's spiritual not temporal. It's not external it's internal. And it's really essential. In fact it is so profound that Jesus prayed in John 17 that we would enjoy fellowship with the Father as the Son enjoys fellowship with the Father. That we would be one as the Father is one with the Son. We're talking about something that is very profound. We're talking about shared life, shared love, shared purpose, shared service, shared truth, share power, shared purpose, a shared present and a shared future.

Just a little technical thinking here, fellowship is a word κοινωνω, verb form, used eight times in the new testament, seven of the times it's translated share. And one time translated participate. The noun form, which appears about 30 times κοινωνία, very common word in the church's life, used about 30 times, carries the idea sharing, contributing, participating and really has the root idea of being a partner. Linked together. So the concept then is fellowship is sharing, contributing, partaking, partnering in a common spiritual life. And we have to get back in touch with that. this is not about showing up once in a while and watching what happens. This is not about cultivating your own life in a personal sense. In fact I don't ever - you will never hear me say you need to have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. I don't use that phrase. First of all it doesn't communicate very well. The devil has a personal relationship with Jesus Christ but it's not a very good one. And I'll tell you something else, every unregenerate person has a personal relationship with Jesus Christ and that too is not a very good one. He knows exactly who they are and it's very personal and He has a record of their personal inequities and on the basis of their personal record they will receive personal condemnation. So talking about a personal relationship with Jesus Christ you could be talking about everybody.

And I don't think we want to talk about - I understand what people mean when they say that. That is knowing Christ which is a better way of saying it, right. Knowing Christ in a saving way. We understand what that means. But when you know Christ in a saving way I don't want to define that as a personal relationship with Christ. I want to define that as you have now entered into a common, shared life with all other believers and it has ceased to be in a truest sense personal. I don't want to say I have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. That's like saying don't step on my space my friend. I'm over here cultivating my personal - what does that mean? I don't know what that means. I do have a personal relationship with Christ and so does everybody else in the sense that He knows me intimately; He knows me very well. More than that I have a redemptive relationship with Jesus Christ which has in a real sense erased my personality and placed me in a common responsibility

within the body of Christ. Does that communicate? It's not really about me; it's about Christ using me for the sake of His kingdom and His body.

So I have to define my life as a Christian as having been introduced into a body. That's what I read in 1 Corinthians 12, "You were baptized by Christ through the Holy Spirit into the body." And you now have a collective relationship with the Lord. You now have a fellowship to which you belong.

So I wanna talk about that and obviously this is a huge subject but I just put together a few things to think about. Number one, the basis of this fellowship. What is the basis? On what basis do we fellowship? All these church growth guys say well you have to get a homogeneous kind of thing, do an assessment of your community, find out what their socio-demographics are, find out what the cultural hot points and kind of design your niche church into that little deal and then you will create this church and it will grow and that's the key to growth. That's what they used to say.

There was a program at Fuller Seminary over in Pasadena. Church growth courses are being led by Peter Wagner and since ours was the fastest growing church and the largest church in the area they would bring their classes here. Eventually after a couple years of that Peter called me one day and says we're not coming anymore. And I said why. He said because your church messes with our model. We have this model that we teach and we have all these numbers, 01, 02, 03, C1, C2, C3, all these little codes that they create a formula to grow a church and you confuse the students because your church is growing it's the largest church but you don't do any of that. What struck me was - and I said to him, I said well maybe you don't X us out; maybe you change the model. Is this selective research. If you find something that doesn't go along with your research ignore it? He said we don't get it. We tried to analyze it. What is it? What is the basis of your fellowship? That's the question. And it's not cultural and it's not racial and it's not economic and it's not intellectual and it's not educational and it's not denominational and it's not about emotionalism and it's not style; what is it?

Turn the 1 John 1 and I'll tell you what it is. You knew I was setting you up. 1 John 1 - I mean this is just very clear, you'll see it. That beloved apostle John writing this letter, the one who was with Jesus on the intimate side, Peter, James and John the inner circle, John, writing this first letter starts this way, "What or probably better who was from the beginning, whom we have heard, whom we have seen with our eyes, whom we beheld and our hands handled concerning the word of life." He says I'm writing about the word of life. Who's that? Christ, the living word; the word who is life who gives life. The incarnate word, John 1 "The word became flesh." So I'm writing about Christ and I was with Him from the beginning and I saw Him and I beheld, meaning I looked more intently, a stronger verb, and I touched Him. And I'm gonna tell you about Christ and this life, this eternal life was manifested, verse 2, we've seen and we bear witness and proclaim to you the eternal life, the eternal life identifying Jesus Christ which was or who was with the Father and was manifested to us. He says I wanna tell you about Christ and this is not second hand information. I've heard Him. I've seen Him. I've touched Him. I've looked deeply into His life. His life was manifested, I saw it and I give first

hand witness to it. and I proclaim to you that this is the eternal life who was with the Father and was manifested through us. And then verse 3, "and we have seen and heard," this is the third time he says it in three verses, "and we proclaim to you also in order that you also may have," what? Fellowship with us. How do you get in the fellowship? By hearing and believing the truth about Christ. I'm gonna tell you about Christ so that you can have fellowship and indeed for real, verse 3, our fellowship is with the Father and with His son Jesus Christ. What an offer, what a great way to begin a letter.

Dear folks, I have some really good news and it's true. I was there from the start. I saw, I heard, I looked deeply, I touched this eternal life who was with the Father, who was manifest in this world in human flesh and I'm telling you He came and gave us a message if you will hear it and believe it you can have fellowship with Him, with God and with us. That's the launch of the gospel offer. You wanna be in the fellowship.

So the question is what's the basis of fellowship? Salvation. Salvation. You come to Christ, you hear the gospel, you believe the gospel, you're in the fellowship. That's why Grace Church looks like it looks. This is anything but homogeneous. We're all over the place because the criteria for being here is you be in Christ. And we're not in charge of that right. that's God's work. I'm just so thankful that Grace Church looks like Los Angeles; what else should it look like? This is Los Angeles.

Now if you're a Christian you're in the fellowship. I had a pastor say to me when I was in England if people don't believe in your doctrinal statement do you let them in your church. If people have different views, one guy just asked me last wee, if people have a different view of speaking in tongues will you let them in your church? And I said let me let you in on a little secret, if you can get in God's kingdom you can come to our church. How's that? What do you think we're gonna do? Set a higher standard? Well you may get into God's kingdom but you're not getting in here. What? The Lord may accept you; we're not. Well that's great. That makes a lot of sense. But what if they can't sign the doctrinal statement? We'll teach them. what are you gonna do? You can't expect a newborn babe in Christ to understand all the ramifications of a doctrinal statement and you've got to understand that people are pouring into churches from other experiences where they were knee deep or neck deep in error. What are you gonna do? Close the doors to them when the church is the pillar and the ground of the truth and the church is a fellowship?

Look, if God accepts you we accept you. we throw our arms open and embrace you and pull you in as tightly as we can and love you with as much love as we've got for anybody. Frankly, I don't care what your doctrine is as long as your doctrine of the gospel is right, as long as you get the drive chain right, you believe in the trinity, you believe in the deity of Jesus Christ, His virgin birth, His sacrificial atonement, His resurrection, and if you believe in salvation by grace through faith the other stuff we'll get to as you learn the Word of God. This is the church. If you're in the fellowship you're in the fellowship. And we might as well get used to you down here; we're gonna have you forever. And

we'll appreciate you much more when your perfect if we knew you before you were, right? I mean that just goes without saying. I mean that's what the fellowship is.

I've heard people say well so and so is out of fellowship. What are you talking about? Did they lose their salvation? You can't lose your salvation. So if you're ever in the fellowship you're never out of it. You're in the fellowship that's it. you're safe; you're in the fellowship. Now you're either a help or a hindrance; you're either a blessing or a pain. But that's how the body works, isn't it? And so we have to make sure that you understand there are no frozen organs out there waiting to be transplanted who have life, spiritual life, on hold. You're in the fellowship for whatever you are you're in the fellowship and we embrace you.

See that's one of the burdens that pastors carry. It's - sometimes I hear people say well so and so left the church but it's good riddance. What are you talking about? How could it be good riddance? They're in the fellowship. That's part of the body. I'm not happy about that. You say well they went to another church. Oh that's a great thought; they're a problem to you so wish them on somebody else. What does that do? I heard pastors say well we have a great revival in our church. Really, how many were added? None but a whole bunch left. Blessed subtractions. You can't view a church like that. This is a body. This is a fellowship. And that's why Paul said you know the concerns for the church was what pained him more than all his physical struggles because who was weak without him feeling the pain; who fell into sin without him feeling the hurt because this is a body. And if you're not functioning that's a problem for all of us. So the basis of our fellowship is salvation. If you're saved you're in the fellowship.

And some of you are making a maximum contribution to the health of the body of Christ and some of you are not functioning at all. You're just there. and from time to time when we fall into patterns of sin we become kind of a debilitating element in the body, a sickness, a disease, an illness. So you see the objective is this, look, when the gospel came the gospel came to create a fellowship, to create a fellowship. It wasn't all about your personal relationship. It was about the fellowship. And I just don't understand people who just kind of float around. That's a form of disobedience and unfaithfulness. The Lord brought us together as a fellowship.

Let me ask a second question, what's the nature of this fellowship? The basis of it is salvation; what's the nature of it? And I've already given you the word. The best word I can think of is sharing. It's you could say mutuality, commonality, togetherness, communion, whatever words you wanna use, synonyms are abundant. It's shared life. Shared life.

You know in Acts 2, on the day of Pentecost when the church was founded there was a lot of Jews in Jerusalem who didn't live there. they cam in by the tens of thousands, the feast times in Jerusalem they were the diasporas, they were dispersed and scattered all over the Gentile world. But at their great festivals they would all come to Jerusalem, so Pentecost is one of the great feasts and all these

Jews come to Jerusalem. Peter stands up, preaches his sermon, you remember what happened? Three-thousand are converted, right. what do they do? They got 3,000 who are converted; most of them left or should have left to go home. Most of them were pilgrims so the question, at least many of them, I'm confident most of them were, what are they gonna do? If they go home there's no Christians, there's not churches, there's no teaching, there's not fellowship, there's no nothing. So they stayed.

And it says in Acts 2 that they were all together every day. Why? What drew them together? Common life. There wasn't a great revival and then they all went their way and said I now have a personal relationship with Christ. They couldn't disconnect. They were together every single day listening to the apostles' doctrine in fellowship, Acts 2:42, at the Lord's table celebrating their common ground on the cross and praying and proclaiming the gospel every day. And Acts 2 says they had all things in common. Why? The people who were pilgrims there left their jobs back home so they had no income, they had no food, they probably needed clothes, they had to have a place to stay. So what happened was the church born that day absorbed those people. That's why later on - and they stayed. Some of them stayed so long that even years later Paul's going all over the Gentile world trying to raise money trying to support the saints of Jerusalem who never left. Cause they're a huge burden to the church. And even many of the Jews were poor because when they came to Christ even though they lived in Jerusalem they were kicked out of their families, lost their jobs, paid a severe price, hated by father, mother. Remember Jesus said that. Ostracized, alienated, persecuted. So the church had a huge burden.

But in Acts 2 it says that they had everything in common. Doesn't mean they pooled everything and split it up like communists. It simply means they understood when somebody had a need and somebody else had a resource they would take that resource and meet that need. Some of them had property and possessions which they actually sold. Took the proceeds to meet needs. And that's how giving began in the church. They all understood this is fellowship. If you have a need and I have a resource, hey, meet your need. If the time comes that I have a need and you have a resource you meet my need. That's sharing at the most basic level of life. They shared a common spiritual life which gave them a common love for each other. They looked not on their own things but on the things of others and considered others better than themselves. There shouldn't be some kind of difficulty to free you up to be generous with God's people and God's purposes and God's kingdom.

This is what it is; fellowship is a sharing. There's nothing that we as believers possess that doesn't belong to the Lord, right. it's all his. That's why when I wrote the book on giving and Christian stewardship the title is "Who's Money Is It Anyway?" it's not yours; it's not mine. So they expressed their partnership in the very practical areas of life. Also Hebrews 10 says forsake not the assembling of yourselves together as the manner of sum is, even then some people weren't faithful in the assembling so they could stimulate one another to love and good works. We need you here. We need you here to stimulate the love and good works. We need you here to be apart of the fellowship.

This is how life in the church is defined.

Aristides wrote in ancient times about Christians. Interesting as a non-believer, as a pagan, this is what he wrote, "They abstained from all impurity in the hope of recompense that is to come in another world." And he says, "When there is among them a man that is poor and needy and if they have not abundance of necessities they will fast two or three days that they may supply the needy with his necessary food. Such is the law of Christians and such is their conduct." I mean they got it. It was about sharing. This is still to be the character of the church. When you talk about the nature of fellowship you're talking about a shared common life at every level, particularly at the spiritual level where we stimulate righteousness in mutual expressions of selfless humility. That's the nature of our fellowship.

Thirdly, there's a symbol for our fellowship. The Lord has actually given us a point of identification. Look at 1 Corinthians 10. And this is a constant reminder of our fellowship and the symbol of our fellowship is in fact what we call communion which is just another English word for the Greek word κοινωνία fellowship. What are we doing when we come to the Lord's table? 1 Corinthians 10, what are we doing? You say well we're remembering the cross, we're remembering the death of Christ. We are. But there's something beyond that; there is at the table of the Lord, at the communion table, a leveling. Doesn't matter who you are in life, doesn't matter if you're rich or poor, it doesn't matter if you're Jew, Gentile, bond, free, male, female, it doesn't matter if you're in the in group, the out group, doesn't matter what your intellect is, it doesn't matter what your achievements are or are not. When you come to the Lord's table with every other believer we are leveled. All of a sudden at the foot of the cross we are all defined by one word. What is it? Sinner. And we can add one very wonderful word to that, forgiven sinner. That's where we find our common forgiveness. Whatever you are or aren't in terms of the structures of society is irrelevant.

Look at 1 Corinthians 10:16 and you see the word sharing twice in that verse. It's the same word for fellowship. "Is not the cup of blessing which we bless a fellowship in the blood of Christ? Is not the bread that we break a fellowship in the body of Christ? Since there is one bread we who are many are one body for we all partake of the one bread." Whatever makes us different here's what makes us the same we were all sinners at the foot of the cross who had to eat the one bread. Right? We had to come to the one Christ. There is no salvation in any other than Christ and we all have come to the foot of the cross as needy, desperate sinners.

So every time we have communion we are to be reminded that this is the fellowship of the blood of Christ. This is the fellowship of the body of Christ. And it is a reminder that we are in the fellowship. And it should remind us as well, look, He saved me to place me in the fellowship. I am so willing to take His salvation, right, but sometimes so unfaithful to discharge the opportunities of fellowship. Oh I'll come to the foot of the cross and get my free pass out of hell. I'll come to the foot of the cross and receive forgiveness. I'll come to the foot of the cross and receive eternal peace and joy but I don't

really want to get involved in any ministry that calls for sacrifice.

You know part of what Jesus said when He said if any man will come after Me let him deny himself is intended to take us beyond the moment of salvation to a self denying life as a Christian, isn't it, where we live sacrificially. So the Lord's table then becomes our symbol and that's why it's important to do it all the time. That's why we do it month after month after month after month after month after month so that we can remember. We visualize that Christ is our head and we are just sinners redeemed by Him who share His life, who share His grace, who are sustained by His power. We're all united in the body and blood of Christ. There are no differences there. You miss the Lord's table and you miss that very important reminder.

There's a danger to fellowship. We talk about the basis being salvation, the nature being sharing, the danger is sin. The danger is sin. Not hard to discern that. sin devastates the fellowship. It's like cancer. Well Paul calls it leaven. Leaven is an influence isn't it? Influences the dough; makes it rise. Sin is an influence. It's a negative influence; it's an evil influence. That's why when there's sin it has to be dealt with. I mean in the body if there's a cancer or there's a disease or if there's something wrong we wanna fix it, we wanna get rid of it so the body can be whole and healthy. The same is true in the church whether it's less to the flesh, less to the eyes pride of life, whether it's pride, evil desire, materialism, every sin in every category infects the body. That's why 1 Corinthians 11 Paul says look if you're gonna come to the Lord's table examine yourself and if you don't examine yourself and you just go running into the Lord's table and take it in a superficial way you're gonna bring judgment on yourself. Then he adds this, "not discerning the body." Because you haven't really understood that your continued sin affects the body. It cripples the body. It impacts our life. It's an illness, it's a sickness, it's a cancer. And of course that then destroys the functioning of the church, the unity of the church and the witness and the power of the church.

Why I remember years ago when Sam Ericson who's a well-known attorney who's on our staff and he was at the same time he was one of our elders he was working for a large firm in LA, law firm. They had a big meeting down there and Sam was so bold he said to them one time, he said I want to invite you guys to Grace Church, all these lawyers. And he invited them. told them about the church service times. One lawyer came to him and said look, I wouldn't go to that church if it was the last church on the earth. And Sam said why. Well the crookedest attorney I know goes to that church. Sam told me that and so I told the congregation on Sunday and 25 lawyers, I think, repented. I didn't know who it was. I figured just catch them all, right.

But I mean think about it, no matter what we were doing, not matter what was going on here, no matter how hard everybody was praying and working and serving that's all it took. That's a high impact. Detraction to the truth and the gospel. That's why Matthew 18 Jesus said this is first instruction He ever gave to the church, the first instruction ever given to the church is in Matthew 18. And He said, "If somebody sins go to them." He wants a pure church. If somebody sins go to them;

if they don't listen take two or three witnesses; if they don't listen you tell the whole church to go and call them back from sin; if they don't listen you put them out. Treat them like an outsider. We have to cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh protecting holiness and the fear of God, 2 Corinthians 7:1. So sin deals a crucial blow to the body.

And many churches, I will tell you this, they may have people, they may have crowds, but the body is in critical condition. If there was an evangelical ICU there are a lot of big churches that would be in it.

Fifthly, the basis of the church is salvation, the nature of the church is sharing, the symbol of the church is the Lord's supper, the danger of the church is sin, fifth, the responsibility of the church, and this is where we need to go, serving. Serving. So okay, you're motivated. You say what do I do, what do I do, what do I do? Just two things, okay, just two things. This is the way to sum up what 2 Corinthians 8:4 calls the fellowship of serving. Wish I could take you to that text but - 2 Corinthians 8:4, fellowship of serving. We are a fellowship of serving. That's the way the body functions. All the parts of my body serve the common good. Is that not true? I mean I'm talking physiologically now, I'm talking anatomically now. And my body, thankfully, follows the direction of my brain. This is good. This is good. When my brain tells my hand something to do my foot doesn't short circuit the message. It's amazing. It's all scripted. And the body of Christ is scripted by the Head who is Christ. And the only question that remains is are all the members functioning. Or are we in some way malfunctioning, which is pretty typical. And the primary responsibility is that every part of the body serve every other part of the body. So whatever your abilities are, whatever your ministries are they're not for you; they're for someone else.

My preaching gift isn't for me; it's for you. your gift of prayer isn't for you; it's for us. Your gift of teaching is for the people you teach. Your gift of wisdom is for the people to whom you reveal the wisdom. Your gift of discernment is for those who need help. Your gift of help is for those who need assistance. Your gift of leadership is for those who need direction. So the first thing you need to know is that you have a spiritual gift. Every believer has it. 1 Peter 4 "As every man has received a gift so exercise it." Now what is this gift? It is a divine enablement. It is a spiritual ability through the power of the Holy Spirit to serve the body of Christ. It's what it is. To build the body. To be strong. To manifest the glory of Christ to the winning of souls.

So you've been given a gift. If you understand this Romans 12 lists several categories of giftedness, I call it. 1 Corinthians 12 lists several categories of giftedness. But they're just categories. They're not air tight, hard and fast. And they're only categories. The way to understand it is you could take wisdom, knowledge, preaching, teaching or prophesying would be the same as preaching, you could take the gift of helps or service, you could take the gift of faith or prayer, you could take the gift of governments or leadership, you could take all of these various kinds of gifts and you could throw in some more and those would be primary colors on a palette. If an artist had a palette, you wanted to paint a beautiful landscape over here, a portrait let's say, and he's got these primary colors. By the

time he gets done blending the primary colors and paints this portrait it's unique. It's the blending. And that's the way spiritual gifts work. People say to me what's your spiritual gift. There used to be tests by which you could define your single spiritual gift. I don't believe that. I believe you have a gift but it's a blending. It's a collage. It's a color that comes out you. You're a spiritual snowflake as the Lord picks and chooses from the palette and paints you. All right. I've tried to answer that question through the years. Well I preach, I teach, I hope, I have understanding of wisdom and knowledge from the Scripture, I've been given responsibilities of leadership and I don't know how to sort all that out. I just know that when I'm faithful and I'm walking in the spirit and I'm committed to doing what the Lord wants me to do this is what I do. I don't have to analyze it, I don't have to categorize it, I just have to be faithful to discharge this gift.

What is it that you love to do? What is it when you do it people are blessed? What is it in your heart to do when you're prompted by the spirit of God? You have a gift. It may be a speaking gift. Peter says there are speaking gifts and serving gifts. It may be a serving gift. But you have a gift that needs to be used. And you can look at those passages, you can look at your life and ask yourself where's my gift and what am I doing with it. This should dominate your life in the church.

The second thing is the one anothers of the new testament. That's broad. The gift is individual; the one anothers are brought. All of us are told to love one another, pray for one another, exhort one another, admonish one another, warn one another, rebuke one another, edify one another, bare one another's burdens. We just take care of each other. We don't despise the least that Matthew 18 says. We don't need another believer into sin. If one believer wanders away we go and bring them back. We don't cause others to stumble. So we have a broad based spiritual responsibility to stimulate one another to love in good works, to fulfill all the one anothers and then we have a very specific responsibility to discharge a gift that God has given us. And if you don't use your gift there's not making it up because you're you and nobody else is. And that's serving.

And again, I know we've talked about this in the past, sometimes when you talk about spiritual gifts people wanna run out and find some way to define their gift. Just do what you do when prompted by the spirit. Just do what's right. do what's in your heart. Do what you can whether it's giving, maybe that's your gift, praying, maybe that's your gift, or serving, maybe that's your gift, or teaching. Just do what your heart is prompted to do. But that should be your life. You shouldn't be giving the world more of your fleshly ability than you give the church of your spiritual ability, right. This is why the Lord gifted you to start with.

Well time is gone and I'll just make one final comment, there's one other thing to say; there's a result. I mean the basis of fellowship is salvation, the nature of fellowship is sharing, the symbol of fellowship is the supper, the danger of fellowship is sin, the responsibility of fellowship is serving through gifts and the one anothers, but what's the result? I mean where does it all finally end? Well of course, a couple of places. John, back to 1 John 1:4 says, "These things I write into you that you're," you're

what? Your joy may be full. You want to live a joyful life give yourself away. Give yourself away. Abandon yourself as a way of life. Use your gift. Get involved in the one another. Serve the church. Be apart of building up the body. And you will receive joy and more than that the body will be built up and Christ will be honored.

Listen to Ephesians 4 "Speaking the truth in love we're to grow up in all aspects and to Him who is the head even Christ to whom the whole body being fitted and held together by that which every joint supplies according to the proper working of each individual part causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love." What happens when the body functions like this is it grows up into Christ likens and it becomes manifestly known by its love because that's what it's really going on, mutual love. And remember what Jesus said in John 13:34-35? If you love one another by this all men shall know what? That you're my disciples. And where love manifests itself is in the sacrifice of the body as it mutually ministers to the honor of its head who is Jesus Christ.

As you go out the door you're gonna see little brochures in the hands of the ushers there. You're invitation to involvement and inside are just a lot of things that you can kind of sort out. The whole church staff is available to you to respond, to help you with this. You can call our Simulation Ministries office; get more help. Come by, talk to anybody. These are things that you're gonna be able to sort through and jump into a ministry. Start with this: be faithful here. Be faithful. I mean that's where it all has to start. And get a mindset that I'm gonna give of my spiritual gift which has eternal value to the church more than I would give of any temporal ability to the world. That's putting treasure in heaven. And you will receive the joy that is promised and the body will grow and the love will be manifest and Christ will be honored and the world will take notice. And that's really why we're here. So as you go you can pick up one of those.

Let's stand for a closing prayer. Just a reminder that in the front the prayer room is open. If you have spiritual needs, if you want to join our church and become a member here and you need to do that, that's really making the commitment. There was no such thing as a Christian in the New Testament time who didn't associate himself with a local church and come under the leadership of the elders and take a position of responsibility there. So if you want some information about that the folks will talk to you about doing that. If you need to know more about the gospel and how to become a Christian and be apart of the body of Christ. Whatever the spiritual needs the prayer room is available.

Father, now we go on our way this morning, brought back to the foundation really, brought back to the start of why we're here and why you brought us into your kingdom. We just ask, Lord, that we would be faithful, keep us from losing these truths which so easily disappear as we step into the business of life. And seal to our hearts these things. Make them convictions that result in faithfulness and we'll give You the praise in Your Son's name.

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