

# Characteristics of a New Testament Church

by Mose Stoltzfus

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*Mose Stoltzfus emphasizes the essential characteristics of a New Testament church, focusing on love, truth, and the need for genuine spiritual engagement.*

**Duration:** 1:09:02

**Scripture:** Acts 2:14

**Topics:** "Church Practice"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of getting involved in mission work and reaching out to souls in need. They encourage listeners to seek God's guidance and direction in prayer, both individually and as a church. The speaker highlights the power of the gospel and the need for preaching it to others. They also emphasize the importance of rejoicing and praising God, as well as living a holy and upright life. The sermon references Acts 2:43 and emphasizes the need for believers to be actively involved in sharing the message of salvation.

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## Transcript

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A special thank you to all who support this ministry. I don't know how long it is since I preached a message like this here at home. In my church planting work and starting small churches around the country, I have preached a message similar to this various times, but this time I kind of started over and used other scriptures.

And again, the subject for my message would be characteristics of a New Testament church. Very, very pertinent and important topic and message for our time because we realize that most of the world has even forgotten what church is supposed to look like and how people are supposed to act and what's supposed to happen on a Sunday morning when we gather like this. Not maybe so bad with a lot of our

people or a number of our people here in Lancaster County, but even here I'm sure that many of the churches are losing their grip on the true characteristics of a New Testament church.

And they have given in to the humanistic philosophy to develop some kind of a meeting on Sunday morning that only entertains the people and tries to hold their interest through various techniques, modern techniques and electronics and music and those kind of things. So let us read first of all from 3 John verse 1 through 8, the book of 3 John. I want you to notice here one of the cornerstones or two of them I should say.

I believe it's all put together in one cornerstone, yes. A building normally doesn't have two. Of this little book here in the Bible, reading from verse 1, unto the well-beloved Gaius whom I love in the truth.

Behold, I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health even as thy soul prospereth. For I rejoiced greatly when the brethren came and testified of the truth that is in thee. Even as thou walkest in the truth, I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth.

Beloved, thou doest faithfully whatsoever thou doest to the brethren and to strangers. Notice that. Which have borne witness of thy charity before the church, whom if thou bring forward on their journey after a godly sort, thou shalt do well.

Because that for this, his namesake that went forth taking nothing of the Gentiles, we therefore ought to receive such that we might be fellow helpers to the truth. There are two words that stand out in this portion of scripture in 3 John that I'd like to make a cornerstone of a New Testament church. They are the words love and truth.

And it is in that combination that we look at that characteristic, one of the great and solid characteristics of the New Testament church, that those two can never be separated. We have a lot of emphasis today on love and how to just love people and to accept people as they are and where they're at. We have all that, I believe, to an overdone level, really, even though I believe there's an element of truth in that when we preach the gospel to an individual living a sinful life, that God saves them if they want to repent and turn to the Lord right there where they're at.

We believe that, but somehow this whole thing is twisted into believing that they can go on and be a Christian just where they're at and stay where they're at and not have any change. But here we have this cornerstone of truth and love, and those two must meet. When we look at the characteristics of a New Testament church, we believe that it must be founded and laid upon truth, and it must be laid upon love.

And we want that to be the outworking, I'm sure, of the church here. Well, we ask ourselves a question this morning, What is church? What is church? What are we even talking about when we look at the subject of the New Testament church? And in order to do that, maybe we have to answer the question, What it is not? And help us to see that so much that is called church today isn't even church, and especially not New Testament church. But we know the word is called ekklesia, and it's talked about, the real meaning is called out ones, and so we believe that there actually is no church anywhere in the country unless there has been a separation from the former life and from the world.

Have you ever thought about that? All these meetings that are going on all across the world where people stay in the world, they are not churches. There's buildings there, and that's another point. The church is not the building.

The church is referred to a group of people that have been called out from the world, from a life of sin, and from going their own way, and have been drawn together, which you'll see in Scripture, by the love of Christ, and they have a commonality there. They have been brought to a common truth, and that foundation is laid in their life, and the result is that they have that love flowing in their hearts, and they love the truth. But if you have not been called out of the world and out of a life of sin, you don't know what church is.

You don't have any idea. You might be in an assembly this morning, sitting there and listening to a half hour of rock music or contemporary Christian music, as it is called. We don't believe it's Christian, but it is contemporary.

We agree with that. But you may be entertained by some kind of a minister who just is joking along in life and making the people laugh and all that, but that is not what we understand the word church is in reference to. So it is not that.

And it's not just hearing a sermon or a speech. There's a lot of people who gather on a Sunday morning, and they do hear a speech of some kind. But the speech is filled with humanistic philosophy and how to feel good about yourself and how to just look at the positive side of things.

It's interesting, as we look at Scripture, how many of them refer to both very positive and very negative things that we have the balance of the two and are able to make and bring ourselves to be a better person when it's all over. That's what should happen. It's not coffee and donuts in the back of the church building, like we have many across the land today.

That's part of the experience. And the people come together to socialize with a few of their friends and have a cup of coffee and some donuts, and they're on their way and not being made a better person for it. I'm wondering how many of you have taken inventory in all the books you've read as to what church was like years ago, and I'm talking about through the years.

You know, men came to church in order to have their heart spoken to. They went there because the Word of God was preached, and the Word penetrated their hearts and awoke them to things that they needed to learn and to believe and to do and whatever else, to live a godly life. But church was, I have to think of the Scripture over in 1 Peter 5, 1 Peter 5, verse 8, where it says there, Be sober, be vigilant, because your adversary the devil is a roaring lion, walketh about seeking whom ye may devour.

And I noticed the sign down Route 322 here. They were going to have a fun day at church, and they were putting up a tent, and I don't know what all they were going to have in there. I didn't stop and look.

They were just putting a tent up on Friday night when we were on our way down to the hymn sing at Pool Forge, and my guess is they were probably going to have all kinds of things for children to jump around on or do or whatever, which is supposed to be an attraction to come to church because of the fun things they were going to do there on Saturday and maybe today likewise. But church was never looked at as a fun thing to do. In years going by, it was a place where the soul was made better by the clear teaching and preaching of the Word of God.

Now, you can say it's very enjoyable to go to church when we're saved and sanctified and God has blessed us and we're meeting other Christians and interacting with them. I find it very enjoyable. But we also have to be prepared to be convicted by God.

And that's right for us to be convicted by God. We're not here just to enjoy the day. We're not here just to meet our friends and have a good time with one another.

We're here to open our life as a book before the God of heaven when His Word is read and allow Him to speak to our hearts. And may we understand these are some of the characteristics that are being lost in the New Testament church and it's time we return to them. We return to those things that are lost.

1 Timothy 3.15 says, But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts and be ready. Excuse me, that's not the one I wanted there. 1 Timothy.

I'm at 1 Peter. Excuse me here. 1 Timothy 3.15, Paul speaking to Timothy said, But if I tarry long that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth.

I love the emphasis of the truth there. But he's saying, if I don't come around for a time here, I want you to know, Timothy, how you ought to behave yourself in the church of God. And that simply tells us there's right and wrong behavior for a church.

And I believe it's also time that we raise that up again in our midst that there's certain behavior that is out of order in the church of God and in the assembly of the saints. And I think it's good for us to meditate upon that very fact that we know how we ought to behave ourselves. We know there's been over in 1 Timothy 6, verse 20, the Bible speaks about, Keep that which is committed to thy trust, avoiding profane and vain babblings, and opposition of science, falsely so called.

And that was written nearly 2,000 years ago. And what a blessing to see again that that needs to be lifted up, that we see that there is a lot of vain babblings going on, talk that doesn't avail anything, plus there's also unintelligible speech going on in a lot of churches that is no benefit to anyone because the people can't hear it and understand and say amen at the giving of it. And so Paul says it would be much better to speak five words in a language that can be understood rather than 10,000 in an unknown tongue.

And so we have a lot of vain babblings that I don't believe is true, speaking in tongues at all. I'm not saying here that there is not a right way and a right place to accept that, although it's a gift and it's not something for everyone. Luck is always often promoted.

But what we have today at least probably 95, 98% is vain babblings. Vain and empty babblings. I look at another scripture I want to turn to here is Acts chapter 20.

And I just have a number of them that I would like to look at here this morning and then we want to go to Acts chapter 2. In Acts chapter 20 verse 27, For I have not come to declare unto you all the counsel of God. Take heed therefore to yourselves and to all the flock, over which the Holy Ghost has made you overseers. He's talking to the elders at Ephesus.

And to feed the church of God that he may purchase, which he has purchased with his own blood. And from that scripture we understand that one of the things that should happen is that there is a sense in which we should be fed spiritually. Now it did me a lot of good to hear the children's class this morning.

There was a feeding element in that message. Just to see all those silver dollar bills pile on that scale against the Bible and have that riveted into our own hearts as adults. You know we have a lot to do with finances these days in our businesses and in our trying to make ends meet as families and so on.

We're always handling money. But how good it is to see that the real eternal values of life have nothing to do with silver and with gold and with the things of this world. Then he says here, For I know that after my departure shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock.

Also of your own selves shall men arise speaking perverse things to draw away disciples after them. Therefore, because of that, that I'm prophesying this is going to happen to the church. While the men were still alive, some of the disciples were very much alive when this happened.

Wolves actually came in, snuck into the churches, became members of the churches. And we even have the example of that of Simon the Sorcerer. And we have the example of Elimea.

Simon was even baptized, you know. And he was a wolf in sheep's clothing who had snuck in unawares. And incidentally Peter caught that one.

But there are times when they creep in that they are not caught until they wreak havoc and there is much destruction in the church of God. Therefore watch and remember that by the space of three years I cease not to warn everyone night and day with tears. Now I want you to take a hold of that.

That struck me very seriously. To realize that for the space of three years the Apostle Paul would have been warning the church at Ephesus night and day with tears. Now don't you think that might have been a bit negative? Warning them of false prophets that are going to come in to try to destroy the church.

And he is so convinced, I believe, that it was going to happen, that it was going to come that he actually warned them and got up there and emotionally was moved to tears as he pled with them to not allow it to happen and not let their own hearts be drawn away after them. Because he knew that's what they were there for, was to draw disciples away after them. So, you know, I think this whole negative, positive thing gets out of order.

We kind of have a guilt trip when we teach and preach things where we warn and admonish people to not go that way and all that. But today psychology has kind of brought a guilt trip on us all that if we speak negatively about anything, that's too negative. That was a negative message.

And we go home condemned thinking it was that way. But that's not the way it is. And I know the Word of God is both positive and negative.

And there are many glorious things to bear in the church and messages to bring of encouragement. And I know that they need to have their rightful place. But here Paul warned everyone night and day with tears.

Just imagine the sobriety and the seriousness of a meeting, of a preacher getting up and warning them night and day. And I believe that simply means there were meetings in the day and there were meetings at night that this happened. And now, brethren, I commend you to God and to the Word of His grace which is able to build you up and to give you an inheritance among them that are sanctified.

I just wanted to read that scripture because I believe that is so important. That we have an inheritance. We are sanctified.

We've been born again. And the Spirit of God and the Word of God continues to have its effect in our lives. Then we can be built up by the Word of grace and have that inheritance come to us.

All right, now let us turn our Bibles to Acts chapter 2. We want to see some of the things that happened in the early church. Now I would like to say something about Acts chapter 2 before we begin and read this. There has been and still is a lot of emphasis among people to try to duplicate or re-enact something that has happened in history.

And I've known a lot of people that talk about trying to repeat Acts chapter 2. There are people that have been so intent in a kind of a personal and selfish way that they have fasted themselves into virtual sickness. And other kinds of things, crying and begging and pleading with God that God would bring a Pentecostal experience like in Acts chapter 2 in their situation. And it doesn't happen.

Do you realize that nothing is ever duplicated hardly in Scripture exactly as it was before? Nearly every experience that happened in any church, you know, was not then again done the same way in the next village or in the next town or the next city that the gospel went. God is a very... a revival is something and it's not wrong to pray for a revival and desire for a revival. But to put that thing in a box and say, I want this kind of a happening, I want this kind of a manifestation in our church or in our time, I do not believe it's right to pray and to seek for it that way.

God brings revival by the wind of God blowing amongst His people according to His Spirit and according to His Word. And I think that book should be left entirely open. Lord, You bring it in the way that You want to bring it.

But we seek to have an awakening and a refreshing time in the presence of God. But let it up to God in how it's done. To try to box it in and say, we want a Pentecost, we want to go up in an upper room, about 120 of us and there tarry for about 10 days until this thing breaks loose and cloven tongues of fire come down upon our heads and we speak in tongues and we get out to the people and the people gather around thinking we're drunk and then we get up and stretch forth a hand and preach the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ and 3,000 people are swept into the kingdom.

I want you to know that Acts chapter 2 is a direct result of a man preaching the absolute truth to the people for three and a half years. That's what brought Acts chapter 2. When the Comforter came and lighted upon the situation and brought both conviction of sin and the manifestation of God changing from the Old Testament law economy to the New Testament dispensation and church life. And how the whole thing was supposed to be and brought a great change there.

And that needed a great authentication from God. That needed a revelation from God. But I believe a lot of it was due to what was preached by Christ for three and a half years.

And there was a build up there and people were looking at this thing and they were sorry some for their sins even beyond that in the preaching of John the Baptist. The people repented of their sins but they didn't get the new life in Christ because he had not died yet, he had not gone to the cross. And so there was a build up for those three and a half years and when the proper time come, when the fullness of time was come, Christ had died and rose again and ascended back into heaven.

And ten days later when those 120 were in the upper room, the timing was right, the situation was right, the pump was primed for all those years ahead of time with truth preaching and the people's hearts were pricked by some of those things and the guilt was upon them for having crucified the Lord or stood there in the crowd and cried out crucify Him and of course here it come and here it was. And it was a marvelous experience but I never believe that anybody anywhere has had a duplication of that experience and could

never have gone into an upper room and carried until God would duplicate this situation. I have never heard of it in history.

I have heard of situations that were different, that people say it was a little like the book of Acts and that's fine. And I believe I have seen some of those things where the wind of God did blow and it did sweep through a community or through a church or through an area where again they were in deep darkness and sin and the light of the gospel shone upon them and was preached and many people got saved in a short amount of time and that's a wonderful thing. Alright, let's read Acts chapter 2 verse 41 to the end.

Then they that gladly received His word were baptized in the same day that were added unto them about three thousand souls and they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship and in breaking of bread and in prayers. And fear came upon every soul and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles and all that believed were together and had all things common and sold their possessions and goods and parted them to all men as every man had need. And they continuing daily with one accord in the temple and breaking bread from house to house did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart.

Verse 47, praising God and having favor with all the people and the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved. That was quite a phenomena. I do agree and I love to re-read that scripture numerous times here.

Alright, the first thing we want to look at is that a characteristic of a New Testament church is that a people gladly receive the word. You don't get anywhere trying to have meetings to stuff Christianity down people's throats. If they do not have an interest in what is going on and voluntarily come there and gladly open their hearts to receive the word of God, you know, it's like speaking to a wall.

Many people have tried to make revival happen that way. They have lured the people in with other ways and maybe giving them some points into something or some other benefits to try to get them into a meeting. But what needs to happen and one of the great characteristics of a New Testament church is this, that people gather to gladly receive the word of God.

Gladly receive the word of God. This doesn't mean, well, I'm here to do my duty and I nonchalantly sit towards the back of the church and I slump down and I say, well, I wonder what he's going to talk about today. This is the kind of attitude that I believe sits up in their bench and maybe even at times is leaning forward because they are so anxious to hear what is he talking about.

I'm talking about a people who have not been preached tired, I'm sure. But it's talking about a people who are hungry to hear the truth, to see if they might be able to adjust their life, their soul into a better person. And when they walk out here, have received something that have edified and lifted them up or convicted them and brought guilt upon them to make confession of sin in their life.

You're made better either way. But in one way or the other, for you to come out, go out the door the same as you came in, is not going to benefit us, is it? But we need to gladly receive the word. And I believe at this time they saw phenomenal things in the crucifixion of Jesus fifty days before.

But he had died and you know the earthquake and the darkness and people rose from the dead three days later and went into the city and appeared in the many and the grave was empty and Jesus was walking around and he was seen of five hundred people and he appeared to his disciples through closed

doors and rumors and stories were going all over the city concerning the phenomenas that had appeared at that time. And it was an exciting time. And when they gathered there fifty days later, there was a hunger and a thirst in the people's hearts to figure out what is going on.

And when Peter got up to preach, they gladly received the word of God. They wanted answers. And I think that's where we need to come to in our time, in our day.

Brethren and sisters, if we're going to be a New Testament church, we need answers. We don't need questions, we need answers. We need reality, we need facts.

And some of the things we have experienced here in the last month are a living reality of that. We're looking for answers. We want to be a New Testament church.

We want to be a holy people. We want to go the right direction. And we want facts.

We want truth. We want reality. Gladly received the word.

They were not offended by the message that Peter preached. They were pricked in their hearts. They were convicted.

Now there may have been some there, that may have been, but for the most part of the crowd, the conviction was so strong, there was not a great offense. They were saying, Lord, what have we done? What have we done? And they even said those words, What shall we do? And I love that approach to the preaching of the word of God. When Paul got it on the Damascus road, he said, Who art thou, Lord, and what wilt thou have me to do? And that's an honest question that you and I need to ask on our knees before God at times and over and over again, even though we have been a Christian for many years.

Lord, I know who you are. I found out who you are. But what do you have me to do now? What do you have us as a church to do? Which direction shall we go? We want to be a people for God.

We want to live godly and upright and holy lives. What would you have us do? And I believe it should be the cry of our hearts in prayer meetings and in collective and corporate prayer meetings and at home in our families. God, show us the way.

And that heart came out in our brother's meeting on Wednesday night by Psalm. And that is good and right for us to seek the face of God to that level. The next thing we notice here is that the gospel was preached.

As I mentioned, Peter got up and beckoned with his hands and said, men and brethren, hearken unto me. And gave them the story and told them the bare facts of what they had done and what had happened and how they had crucified the Lord of glory. And I mean they were smitten to the heart.

They couldn't believe what did we get pulled into. You know how a mob crowd works or a bunch of children get together and some bold one suggests, let's do this, and they all follow. And that's what had happened in the crucifixion of the Lord.

And I believe in the 3,000 that got converted, there may have been quite a number. Who knows? It's a bit conjecture to even venture to say how many there might have been. We don't know.

And I don't want to go overboard there. But there could have been dozens and dozens of them that had cried crucifying. No wonder they said, Lord, what shall we do? Men and brethren, what shall we do? We're guilty.

We actually got sucked into it. We did it. But one of the New Testament characters of the Christian church is to speak boldly and plainly concerning these things.

Tell people what they need to hear. It's been one of the mottos of my preaching through my years in the ministry. Tell them the truth and tell them what they need to hear.

Don't entertain them with a bunch of nice stories and words, but tell the people what they need to hear. And they did that in those days, and that's one of the great characteristics of a New Testament church. Get rid of all this other fluff where it's human psychology and trying to make people lift themselves up by their own bootstraps, away with it.

If you're living in sin, then repent of it. If you're living for God, then rejoice and jump and leap for joy and take the message to others that need to hear it. Well, what happened, one of these great characteristics too, is that the gospel was preached, and it was heard and believed.

But how shall they hear without a preacher? And so, I'm big on that, that the gospel of Jesus Christ needs to be preached, especially so when you get into a new area, you go out into a strange place, and you go to an African village or a Bolivian colony somewhere, or anywhere else in the world, among the Eskimos or the reindeer people of Siberia. What needs to happen is you gather the people together as much as you can, and if you have an interpreter that understands the language, you preach to an interpreter, and you preach to them the gospel of Jesus Christ, the gospel of repentance from sin. And to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, that message needs to be gotten to them as soon as possible.

Many say today, so interestingly, they try to kind of make us speechless, they say, well, you know what we have to do to be saved? You know, you have that question, what must I do to be saved? You know, you have this smart talk where they say, well, we don't need to do anything, it's already been done by Christ. And there's a sense in which I understand, but that's not the answer the brethren got in a New Testament characteristic setting. They got simply told what they did need to do.

And there is something for you and I to do. Even though Christ made the way, and Christ paid the price, it's not true to give such a psychological clip to it like that, and say, you don't need to do anything, it's already all been done. They try to do that to, you know, try and infer that the finished work of Christ is the finished work, and you need to believe it by faith, and I agree with that.

But there are some things to do. The one is to repent of your sin, and the things that you have done, and the other is to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and that's an act on our part. We cannot oversimplify the gospel.

Repent, confess, and believe the gospel. One of the great characteristics of a New Testament church is that every man is a born-again Christian. I believe that is essential that we understand that.

If we want to be a New Testament body, we need to have it made up of born-again Christians. It doesn't say that a hundred or a thousand sinners cannot come and visit, or cannot sit there and hear the gospel, but the church and its membership, and those who are in the brotherhood, need to have experienced a new birth, and have that peace and assurance that they've been born again by the Spirit of God. That's

what makes up New Testament Christianity, a New Testament church.

The next thing we have here, in Acts chapter 2, is they that gladly received His Word were baptized. And we have an example of that today, when I believe seven souls are ready, and have prepared themselves to enter into the baptismal water, and make public confession to the world, and to the devil, and to the neighbors, and to the church, and to anybody who looks on, that I've decided to follow Jesus Christ. That's New Testament Christianity, is that we be baptized upon confession of faith, and give clear testimony to the change that we have made.

And then he says, and there were added unto them about three thousand souls. Now that's an interesting scripture, I think, over in chapter 4. It indicates the same thing, how they heard His Word, and believed. But it says they were added unto them.

Now it hints very strongly, of some kind of a circle of believers, that were understood and known as believers, either by membership, or by baptism, or by church. They were a part of that body. It was very simple.

There was only one church in the land. And you were either in, or you were out. You either believed, or you had unbelief in your life.

And so it was very easy, and very clear, and we didn't have all the fog, that we have to go through today. But a New Testament characteristic, of a person who has been born again, and baptized, is to belong to the group. Whatever you want to call it.

Brotherhood, commitment, member of the church, part of the body, a member, part of the fellowship, being included in the inner circle of brotherhood, is what I believe is meant there. And so we notice, they were added unto them. The next thing we notice, is that they continued steadfastly.

Oh, I like that in our time, in our day. Don't we like that? We hear so many testimonies today, that, oh, I accepted the Lord as my Savior, and it lasted about two weeks, and then it all fizzled out, and it was gone. That's not New Testament Christianity.

That's not a characteristic of, well, we want to build the church of Jesus Christ, at every Christian fellowship. We want the new birth to be so thorough, and so complete in their lives, that after they have had the experience, they continue steadfastly. They go forward.

They go on. The old things start slipping off, and the old habits die, and the old possessions that are not compatible with the Christian life are sold, and put away, or trashed. And they continue steadfastly, because the genuine experience has been of such a caliber, in a New Testament setting, in a New Testament realm, it has been so genuine, that they say, I'll never want to go back to my old life.

I never want to return to my former life. I am selling out. It's lock, stock, and barrel for me.

Oh, to have those kind of conversions in our day, that is what we need so desperately. And I know there's many here like that, and there needs to be many more. I don't know where to put it in.

I know we have it at the end, but one of the characteristics of the Christian life is that there is rejoicing and praise coming forth from the lips of humankind. Men and women, boys and girls, that are born again, that want to walk with God, but there needs to be the ability to praise the Lord, and to thank the Lord, and to

give expression that brings glory to His name. We can be so dry on the vine, that we can simply be drying up and there's nothing going on.

There's nothing flowing. Like one brother tried to describe a church service to me some time ago, years ago, he said, it's so dead, brother, it's deader than dead. And I don't know what that's like, but I have an idea.

Now, it says here in verse 42, and it continues steadfastly in the Apostles' Doctrine. The Apostles' Doctrine. A characteristic of a New Testament church is that the church, the body, the group, continues in the Apostles' Doctrine.

Now, what was the Apostles' Doctrine? That word doctrine is teaching. I thought doctrine divides here today. I thought doctrine stands in the way of unity with everybody.

I thought doctrine is unnecessary. But the Bible says in Acts chapter 2 that they continued in the Apostles' Doctrine. And that means, I believe, that those men who had walked with the Lord for three and a half years and had learned from Him and been taught by Him and sat down and instructed and taught on the Sermon on the Mount and all over the place for three and a half years, they had that in their life, their memory.

And when the Holy Ghost enabled them to do it, they taught the people the Apostles' Doctrine. That's what it was. Furthermore, for us, we have the epistles on top of it when these holy men of God actually wrote it out.

And they told us everything about anything and how to live and how to walk and how to crucify the flesh and how to deny ourselves and how to live for God and consecrate and dedicate our life to the Lord Jesus Christ completely, entirely and have a single eye, as it says here, they did. That's the Apostles' Doctrine. It's not just getting saved.

It's going on to the sanctified life. It's living and continuing in the Apostles' Doctrine. And when you go to the Sermon on the Mount, it touches the pocketbook.

It touches how you treat your enemy. It touches just the persecution that you might receive from people who oppose you. It touches your family if they forsake you.

It touches just every facet of life. And that is what Christianity, New Testament Christianity is all about and church life is simply that we walk in the Apostles' Doctrine taking instruction from the Word of God on how to walk and how to live. So I believe it's both the Gospels and the epistles.

The epistles were not written. But the epistles are simply what their hearts were full of from Jesus' teaching. And I believe for a hundred years there, they didn't have the epistles all collected or written.

They had these letters scattered to the churches. And somebody gathered them up that was anointed of God by the Holy Ghost to put them in the book. But before that, they had it verbal.

And they were only, as Peter preached, or Paul, all night long there where Eutychus fell out of the window. I'm sure he was overflowing of the things that he had been taught of God through the Holy Spirit. And I believe that included the all things.

In Revelation, or excuse me, in the book of Acts back in chapter 1, the next thing I want to look at is that in fellowship, they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine in fellowship. Knowing that isolation does not work for a long period of time unless you're in jail, and you can't help it in God's grace is sufficient there. But there ought to be fellowship.

As we often talk about iron sharpening iron. That's a beautiful experience that I saw again in some of the discussions taking place the other night at the hymn sing. It's just one brother said this, another brother said that, and I noticed it was an iron sharpening iron.

I just enjoyed to sit there and listen to some of those discussions going on. It's been our thinking, and they're thinking scripturally and biblically on how to make the church a better church, and how to function and operate as God would have us. Fellowship.

We need fellowship. Fellowship. We need to be, I often say it, a couple of fellows in the same ship going the same direction.

And we really do need that. That has a lot of implications in it too. But simply just each other's presence.

How are you doing? How are you doing? Well, this is what I'm facing, and this is what I'm facing. And we begin to discuss it, and somebody quotes the Scripture. And we are ministered unto in a direct way.

That is fellowship. Don't get it too worldly, and too carnal, and too foolish. I'm not wanting to sober it up that we can't laugh and have a good time together and enjoy each other's presence, and we don't always maybe have to have our nose into the Word of God discussing the Scripture.

But let's at least have some of that, and not be so far over on the social side that we can't enjoy a real biblical discussion where iron does sharpen iron. It teaches us how to live. Do you know the Word of God? There's a lot of people in the world today, and that's what's happening.

If you go out witnessing the souls, you find so many people, they don't know who they are. But do you know the people that follow the Scriptures and follow the Christian church, they only know who they are. They know pretty much who everybody else is.

They can tell by bearing witness with our spirit and their spirit that we are the children of God, or whether they are simply off the wall and they're in a foreign field somewhere, you know, somewhere into delusion of this world. You not only know who you are and where you come from, you even know where you're going. And not only that, you pretty much can tell about where the rest of the world is at too as you interact with them.

It's an amazing wealth of information. And that's one of the characteristics of the church of Jesus Christ. I am thrilled to live in this day and know what's going on.

It also has the Word of Prophecy concerning the future. It not only knows what happened, that we're all born in sin, and we're dead in trespasses and sins, and we were alive without the law once, but sin revived and we died. And then we got born again, and we got born the second time.

And then we really learned how to live, and all at once we saw ourselves in perspective with the entire human history. And we know where we fit in and how God's mercy reached us, and we got saved. Oh, I tell you, that's just a wonderful thing.

And then you walk up to some poor hippie-looking fellow with rings in his ears, you know, and being a dope-head or whatever, and you ask him questions like this, and he's saying, I'm trying to find myself. And he is, and he has been for years perhaps, but he's all looking at the wrong place. And we burden for him, because we can tell him where to look right now.

And he can find himself and know where he's going too. The Bible is a wealth of information. It'll tell you how to spend your money.

It'll tell you frugality. It'll teach you self-denial. It'll teach you how to get along with people.

It has so much instruction, it'll tell you virtually anything from A to Z. And how we should live and walk through this world. It has the knowledge of the ages. Not only who we are, but who we can be in Christ if we continue to grow and let ourselves be sanctified.

Fellowship is also a time, very positively now, to find encouragement and thankfulness. And there's discussion and a belonging to it all. You know, first of all, one of the things I like about church is the fact that I feel like it's family.

In fact, it's closer to me than my family. I'm not ashamed to say that. It's the closest thing that I have on earth.

It's the church of Jesus Christ and my beloved brothers and sisters whom I have loved and appreciated through the years and gotten to know and trust that I can bear my heart to them. And that is very important that we have fellowship to that degree. But I also like the thankfulness of it.

Because in a good fellowship, there is often men and women talking about thankful. Well, how are you doing? Better than I deserve. You know, they'll say words like that.

I say, yeah, amen. We're having things, the blessings we have in life is better than we deserve. And another one says, you know what God did to me and, you know, I just had a wonderful experience and we had sickness and we prayed and somebody got healed and somebody got hurt and the doctor even said the healing was above normal and above average.

You know, hospitals say it. Doctors say it. And all these kind of things that I realize that there's a thankfulness among the children of God that is not this mumbly grumbly, you know, attitude that how bad the weather is and how bad everything is, you know, around you.

But there's a good part of life and an encouraging part of life and to go forward and even if we die, we know even that we'll go to heaven and praise God. Even that attitude that should we not make it out of a disease or out of a sickness, individuals can come to peace right there about it in their final weeks and final months that they have of cancer and disease and problems and yet have a positive attitude and go to glory triumphantly. But that sense of belonging is so special.

And in breaking of bread, the Bible says, and I believe it has to do with the communion service, talking about commemorating the broken body of the Lord, the crucifixion of the Lord, remembering that until He comes. So there is holy communion and it's only right if it's holy. If it's unholy, we get to ourselves sickness and sleepiness.

First Corinthians 11 tells us, but if it's a holy communion, it is encouraging. I'm not asking for total perfection here, but I believe knowing sin needs to be confessed and dealt with and we come to communion table with a clear heart. And when we commune on that level, there is a blessing, there is an encouragement, there is a joy that comes out of that and we remember the Lord and we don't forget His death and His price that He paid for our sins and what it took and should bring us back in that servitude to Him.

Lord, what will you have me to do while I have life and breath and health yet in this world? And then he says, prayers. And that I believe is both private and corporate, but I believe here it may refer more to corporate because that's the context. They continue steadfastly in the Apostles' Doctrine and fellowship and in breaking of bread and in prayers.

Prayer meetings. It's just such a joy to me whenever I run into these religious groups that they have outlawed prayer meetings, I know they're dead and there's nothing there. Except maybe for an individual here or there that got revived.

Because prayer meetings in the Bible, because when Peter was in prison, they had prayer for him. They had a corporate prayer meeting for him and while they were praying, he shows up at the door, his chains had fallen off and the young girl wrote open the door for him and let him in and they were amazed at the whole thing and it was a marvelous experience, but the Bible teaches prayer meetings. And it's right to get together for corporate prayer.

And somehow the power of it all enhances and greater works are done by it when we enter into one accord in one spirit and cry out to God for a given thing. It's in the Bible. One of the great characteristics of the New Testament church is its prayer meetings.

And you've read the stories of what church is like when the prayer meeting dies. It's the death knell of the church when the prayer meeting dies and we can't gather to pray anymore like I remember we used to go down the road here a few miles past the church on Sunday morning it might have been well I was always in church somewhere but from what you heard the parking lot was full. But then when you pass on a Wednesday night there might have been 7 to 8 or 9 cars with old men or old women.

A lot of times it's old women gathering for prayer meetings. That is a sign of death to the church because there should be corporate prayer in the congregation. And I don't know where to put it in here but I know it belongs in here is that the church should give itself also to the concern of the lost and missions and witnessing and testifying of the Lord.

There should be an outreach from a congregation. It seems to stagnate and fossilize when there is not an outflow from the church with a burden for other souls. And so I do believe very specifically in our experiences here we can say the head needs to wag the tail.

The head needs to come from the tail not the tail of the head. And so missions shouldn't be so dominated that it runs the home churches. But it ought to be such that it is an arm of the church and we reach out from the church with the oversight of the church and its missions should come out of that, flow out of that.

And I wish I'd have time to talk about the different aspects of missions that we have had to enjoy here these past eight years. But I want to commend you. I know there's probably a fraction of the church here who doesn't get involved hardly at all.

Shame on you. That's not good. Every one of you ought to have some kind of involvement whether you work in the tape ministry or whether you pray for the outreach or pray for new souls that are contemplating conversion and somehow act or drive a bus or put up a tent or take care of one or whatever.

But there have been so many aspects of mission that have come out of here that it's been the thrill of my life. They have been so diversified. And I really love it.

It just uses so many more gifts. But let me tell you again and underscore again that you need to get involved in one way or another for the souls of humanity. There's where the power, there's where the blessing comes, and that's where the excitement is seeing souls come to Christ.

Now, we go to verse 43. Fear came upon every soul and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles. And this is something that I believe was a bit unique for that time.

You do not see that in the end of the book of Acts like you do at the beginning. And for the most part you do not see the signs and wonders coming in the fullness that they did and repeated again. Many people have tried to repeat that and it seems futile.

Nobody can get it accomplished. But I do have to say that when the Gospel is preached to an unknown people that are in darkness of witchcraft and animism and sin, there is historically known to be a greater outworking of miracles and wonders than there is otherwise. And I don't know why that is except we have the Word of God.

It seems like in our, where the Scripture is present, it's not as pronounced in that way. But you go somewhere where the people are illiterate, they can't read or write, and you preach the Gospel, there's some divine revelation seems to show up in the midst of that situation. And that's a blessing.

All that believed were together and had all things common and sold their possessions and goods and parted them to all men as every man had need. And I'd just like to say here, much could be said about those two. I do believe we have seen a portion of that.

Maybe not all that we should see. I believe there's some need of encouragement and awakening of that element. But I'd like to talk just a little bit about giving and sharing.

1 Corinthians 16.2 Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store as God has prospered him and that there be no gatherings when I come. We're talking here about proportionate giving. We're talking here about men according to their ability, as the Bible says in another scripture.

Obviously the young person or the person maybe who has many children and have had a lot of financial tightness in their life and a lot of expenses or sicknesses or debt and spills cannot give like the individual who doesn't have those things. And so I don't think that should make us feel bad as proportionately as the Lord has prospered us, as the Lord has blessed us. But I do believe as we can that we open our heart and begin to share with one another and cover that there is an equality and not a deep poverty and a very rich level in the church and how we live.

I think there ought to be more of a similarity between us unless somebody is lazy. If somebody doesn't want to work, the Bible says he shouldn't eat. And I don't believe he should have a social handout all the time if he's not willing to work and just wants to laze around.

He has to learn and get a little hungry to motivate him to get to work. But for the rest, I believe God is calling us to be a sharing people, a caring people, a borrowing and lending people to one another. I believe that's biblical.

Those are characteristics of a New Testament church. That's how we ought to help each other. That's how we ought to live.

We can let people use our cars and loan them out to each other if they're taken care of properly. And when we do those things, be careful and be honest and upright about it. Don't take advantage of your brother or you'll ruin that thing.

You know, I think that's right. But a true characteristic of a New Testament church that they are a sharing and caring church and a borrowing and lending to one another and helping each other out both in the physical and the financial. And I think that's very much a blessing.

And then he says here, and they continue daily in one accord in the temple and breaking bread from house to house. They need their meat with gladness and singleness of heart. And it just shows the tranquility, the peace that comes upon a church that gives themselves to those New Testament principles, that godly teaching and instruction that runs strongly through the New Testament.

And there's a peace and a blessing that comes on it. Praising God and having favor with all the people. Now, I'd just like to add yet that I believe the church, one of the New Testament blessings of the church life and some of the fringe benefits of it are also the benefit of the widow and orphan.

I have seen the church and I know this through the years that husband and wife both die of disease or in an accident that it's the relatives and the church and if the relatives can't do it, the church stands up and takes those children in and raises them to adulthood. That has happened through the years in the New Testament church. And that's a blessing.

I likewise like to see when our arm reaches out to those kind of needy people. I have always been blessed when I see someone extending a hand to needy ones and somehow I see the kingdom of God. That's part of the package of the kingdom of God.

That's part of the New Testament expression. The next one is social life and companionship. Nothing is ever better, works out better in marriage partners and companions than in the church of Jesus Christ.

When I see what the world goes through in a Catholic marriage of Protestants and the fight is on as to where to go to church and how to raise our children and they didn't even talk or look at the issue much before marriage or maybe not at all and thought they'd work through that later. How much better it is to choose companionship within the Christian family, within the Christian church where it's expected which way we're going and what we're doing. And so I'd like to just encourage that and bless God for that.

It's such a blessing that companions find each other either in our church locally or in a similar church in another state that has very similar standards and very similar direction and I see dozens of them and dozens of them in my time and they do well and they prosper and they make it and there's not a lot of friction. That is of God. That's the way God designed it to be.

Well, I see our time is up. We are limited a bit in our time and I think with the announcement that was made before and I'm sure that there are many other fringe benefits in the church of Jesus Christ in our

time that could be brought out and perhaps around the tables we can talk about some of those things this afternoon and we have a baptism at 2 o'clock down by the river so I think we will close and turn the time over to Brother Dean. The point that I would like to make comment on was when talking about family, Brother Mose said that this is his family much more so than his own blood family.

One of the things that the interrogators tried to bring on the Anabaptists when they were trying to get them to deny their faith was that they would bring up their family, their wife, their children, their relatives, and if they just deny their faith they could go back to their family or sometimes even bring their family in to see them or something. But those interrogators didn't realize that they had a family that meant more to them than their blood family. Well, we have a few minutes here.

Does anyone have a word this morning? A testimony? Raise your hand. We'll get a microphone to you. I just want to say that I appreciated the message this morning.

I felt like as you went through those points, Brother Mose, my heart was being refreshed and strengthened. And I find it a great encouragement to look at the New Testament there and see that the church that my heart agrees with and longs for is the one that the Bible manifests there. I thank you for taking the effort and praise God for that message.

Daniel, did you have your hand up? Yes. Thank you, Brother Mose, for that inspiring message. I would just like to read a verse here in Romans 12, verse 3. For I say through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, according as God has commanded me.

To every man the measure of faith. And I would just ask the church to pray for me. The Lord has been speaking to me in that area here recently.

In that area, I tend to think of myself more highly than I ought to think. I'm just time and again reminded of who I was before I met Christ and that every good thing that comes from my life is because of what Christ is doing. And it's not that it doesn't come to myself from myself.

I would just like to confess that I am tempted in that area and request prayer. Thank you.

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