

(Church Life) the Value of Church Membership - Part 1

by Mose Stoltzfus

The sermon emphasizes the importance of church membership and local church fellowship, highlighting the need for intimacy, love, and spiritual growth in the body of Christ.

Duration: 1:00:28

Scripture: Acts 2:3, Romans 12:4

Topics: "Church Membership", "Holy Spirit"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker shares a personal experience of a young boy and a horse to illustrate the importance of teamwork and unity. He emphasizes the need to be taught by the Lord and led by the Holy Spirit in order to achieve accord. The speaker encourages the audience to leave behind old traditions and follow the word of God through the spirit of God. He also highlights the significance of maintaining a teachable spirit and preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ. The sermon references Matthew chapter 16 and the boldness of Peter in proclaiming the gospel despite opposition and persecution.

Transcript

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It's a good psalm. Shall we bow our heads in prayer? Our loving Father, O God, we come to you in Jesus' name, and we do pray once again that you would direct our lives today, our lips, O God, that they speak thy word and interpret it rightly, rightly dividing the word of truth. We pray, give us your Holy Spirit.

We do not want to do this in human effort or our own strength or our own words, Lord, but only to expound that which is already bound in heaven, that which is already written. Thank you, dear God, for this

opportunity and assembly. We pray in Jesus' name.

Amen. I'd like to just clarify a few things here. I got a note from one of the men here.

Would you explain the difference between being born again or converted or enlightened, and if there's a difference, in what order do they come? A bit of a complicated question, perhaps, and I'm not going to spend the full amount of time on it that I would like to, but I would like to say this. Yeah, there is a difference. Light is something that a person gets when their heart begins to get illuminated by truth, and especially the truth of the word of God, and that is a long process to someone obscured in deep ignorance and darkness.

I have to think of my father, especially. I don't know how long his journey was from the time he quit smoking until he got born again, but I would guess it could have been eight years, seven, eight, nine years. And because the ignorance was so great, and there was so little knowledge or teachers available in the realm in which he lived, you know, it was just almost impossible for him to really have someone explain, and he just didn't have those kind of contacts hardly in the earlier years until he finally got desperate enough to step outside of that closed circle in which he lived and begin to ask questions.

But so that is being enlightened. You can have a lot of light, but the conversion or born-again experience, and that is difficult for some. It is some of them.

Some of them it is difficult to pick, but what we look for usually is some span of time, days, hour, minutes, a week or two or something, where a person has come to the end of himself and sees himself a sinner, and in that has an attitude and a heart of repentance. He may only say, God, be merciful to me, a sinner, but in it all, there is a time of actually receiving the atonement from Christ, that Christ died for me and is inviting me to his kingdom, and I receive it and believe it. Now, where the confusion often comes in conversion is that individuals repent of their sins and are sorry for the life they live, but the faith to receive the Lord is missing.

And so I would just like to say that is the order in which I like to put it, and most often should happen, that there is an enlightenment of truth in the gospel and my needs, and then I am brought to repentance and confession of sin, and then to receive the Lord Jesus Christ without work, without any human goodness, come as we are to him and say, Lord, I cannot save myself, I need help, and cry out to God, and those that call on the name of the Lord shall be saved. Alright, I have the going into the more practical side of church life now. I am going to dare, if I may, to speak on the subject of the value of church commitment or church membership or brotherhood commitment or covenant or whatever you want to call it.

And I realize that that is going to reach some of you where perhaps you have given some thought to and have decided it is not necessary and all of that, but I am just going to give what I see in the Word of God and give you some scriptural examples of what I see happen in that concept. I have never been able to understand why church membership is objectionable with the amount of times that the Bible speaks about being members one of another. I cannot figure that out.

I know you have probably been burnt, and you have had a bad experience a couple of times maybe in your journey, but to come to a point where you say, I do not believe in membership, it is not in the Bible, I cannot understand. You know, we sometimes talk about the veiling or various other doctrines that are mentioned basically in one chapter of the Bible, but the amount of Scripture that talks about the local fellowship, submission to authority, the one-anotherings, all the one-anotherings. Now the church is both

universal and local.

And when you are born again, you are a member of the universal church. But to stop there and think that I never need the one-anothering of the Bible, never have authority, spiritual authority in my life, never be a part of a brotherhood that functions and unifies their hearts one to another to become an entity of strength and power. Brothers, what are we doing with the Scriptures? The Word of God says, like Romans chapter 12 and 1 Corinthians 12, Romans 12 verse 4, For we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office.

So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and everyone members one of another. You have the word just over and over again. 1 Corinthians 12, 12 says, For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ.

And then we have the whole concept of the word body. The word body and the whole, you know, can the eyes say, because I'm not the foot, I'm not part of the body, and you have all of that. That has to be speaking of the local body.

The universal body could not apply. That one member cannot submit one to another or love one another in a fervent way to where there's reality to it. In the universal body, there's no reality to that.

And you can live your own agenda and have your own program and your own little home, you know, in your living room where you have your devotions on a Sunday morning, but it is not going to fulfill a hundred Scriptures of the New Testament. It never will. For you to do it temporarily, God bless you and do it.

You know, if you're alone somewhere. But for you to make a choice that this is what I believe and this is what I'll have for the rest of my life is wrong. It's not according to Scripture, I believe.

And so, I'd like to give you that. Then we have Ephesians chapter 4, and all of those verses concerning how there is one body and one spirit and because you are called, even as you are called in one hope of your calling, we have some apostles, some prophets, some evangelists and teachers for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body. And those things very much are in focus in the local body, although the gifts of prophets and evangelists and teachers can also be in the wider body.

But when you get into the husband and wife allegory there in comparison, you have very strong indication of how the local body is to be something that is real and functioning and submitting one to another and having a very harmonious time. Now, I'm going to lay some of the Scriptures there aside from Paul's epistles and give you what I believe the picture of the Lord Jesus gave to us concerning that. I'm going to go to the upper room at the Last Supper and just go down through the points of the experience of the upper room.

Then we're going to switch to Acts 1 when they returned after the ascension and got into the upper room again. And we're going to look what happens as a living example at the beginning and the founding of the Church of Jesus Christ for us to pattern after a bit. In Luke 22, verse 12, we have a Scripture given, and I'm not going to read it for the sake of time.

It is all pretty familiar to us. And when I mention some of the things that happened, I'm sure it is that familiar to you that for 98% of you, it will pop right into your mind, yes, that's right, they did do that. And so

we're going to take a tour of the room, and it's happening here this morning as we look at this subject of, and I simply give it as a question, the value of church membership, or I can even say I want to answer the question by the Word of God, should a person become a member with other men and submit to some human authority in a true church setting, is that a scriptural thing? Those are some of the questions we'd like to be answering.

Now, we're going to turn away from the time alone with God, even though we know that is essential, and very much so that you have that independent and personal relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. But there again, the hybrids have taught us that it's only you and God, and that's all that ever matters, and we have had so much damage in the last hundred years with the concept that you just attend some church service, and your relationship is between you and God, and communion is between you and God, and they have no understanding of body workings, and body language, and body functioning. So we're putting that aside, even though we recognize the salvation experience and all the personal relationship with God is right, but there comes a time when you step out of that, like my experience was in total ignorance of God's Word nearly, and of that, that I had such a longing to go to another meeting, and to gather around and talk a little with some of the men and some of the boys of my age concerning the things of God.

It's a place of close, intimate fellowship. There is an intimacy here that we notice. He said, come, they were supposed to gather themselves into an upper room furnished.

The room was furnished. It was provided supernaturally by God, and the Lord Jesus told them where to find it, and they followed the man with a pitcher of water, and he showed them the room, and sure enough, they got the Word out, and everybody gathered there, Jesus with the twelve. And there we have a picture of what is supposed to be the church of Jesus Christ, Jesus in the midst of His disciples.

Because all of us are supposed to be disciples, and Jesus should sit in the midst of all of us at all times in our church services, our brothers' meetings, and everything we do. It's interesting that the highest piece of artwork of any value in the entire world is the painting of that picture. I don't think there's any piece of artwork in history, in human history, that's higher valued in dollars than the Last Supper.

Christ is in the midst. It's a scene of love. It's so intimate, and this may almost be repulsive to some of you, but it is so intimate and so close that John is lying on Jesus' breast.

You know, some of you have struggles with just giving another brother a kiss. How about lying on somebody's breast? Because the love relationship, in a pure and a right way, is that good. Conversation takes place, it is believed, and I think it makes sense, although I wanted to research it again, that John 14, 15, and 16, and 17 were all spoken at that meal, or at that upper room there.

And if I could just go back and scan over that, you know, John 14 is the Scripture to the Father, John 15 of the Son, and John 16 of the Holy Spirit of the Comforter. They're all there. And tremendous power of teaching was given in that intimate setting.

And in an intimate setting like that, in a very comfortable, away from the din and the noise of the streets separated up there, in that upper room, that is a perfect thing. You know, you don't always have to be standing in a pulpit to do teaching. You can do an awful lot in a living room.

And I really encourage that. Likewise, although don't put aside preaching. The news of the betrayal came forth.

That one of you shall betray me. We've got to have honesty in an upper room, fellowship like that. We cannot just assume things.

Even though we have some bad news to share, we've got to share it. It's not going to work just to never talk about the issues that are really serious and really pertinent of the day. And so here it was that one of the 12 was actually going to betray the Lord Jesus.

And Jesus spilled the beans and made it known there, and the individual was sitting there. But next, what happened in that upper room fellowship, and continued to think about the church of Jesus Christ and our experience in it, was that there was self-examination took place. They didn't cry out and say, who's the culprit? They said, is it I? Would I do something like that? And there was that humble, the fear of God, that we have walked with our Master for three and a half years, and the one who plotted the thing knew well enough, and became extremely uncomfortable.

But can you just see, one of you have done it, and Jesus could have very easily said, there's one sitting right over there. But He didn't do that. Because it would have spoiled the intimacy, it would have spoiled the whole meeting, I believe, for what was intended there.

So He just said it that way. And the disciples sat around there, and the rest of the 11, and they said, is it I? Lord, is it I? And that is an essential part of church fellowship. There needs to be that kind of a profile, I believe, many times in our brothers' meetings.

Have I done anything to offend you? Did I cause a stumbling block to my brother? Oh, we are so independent-minded, we can't even think that way. We can't even talk like that hard to say. We point fingers, and we accuse, and we do those kind of things.

But that's not what happened in the upper room fellowship. There was, is it I, Lord? Have I perhaps some attitude? Have I perhaps said some words that have hurt and offended my brother? Am I about to do something which I have no idea, I don't know in my own heart, and I'm about to commit something, and I don't know, I'm about to do it, and I need somebody like heaven there to reveal the awful thing that is about to happen. There was a Passover meal.

Intimate fellowship is often around food. You know, a table is a very interesting thing. We talk about it Sunday afternoons, how the fellowship changes sometimes when we move from the table into the living room.

You know what? Intimate fellowship is right at about three, four feet distance. If you get closer than that, you back away. It's an aura that we have around ourselves that you kind of move into my space, and you know, we all, some brothers just, you know, you have a few brothers that do that.

They come right up to you and want to talk to you about a foot away from you, and we all back up, don't we? But you get about three, four feet distance across the table, and it's the right distance, and the fellowship is sweet, and we have a meal together, and we're able to interact together. That is the picture of what should happen in the local church. There ought to be conversations like that with that kind of atmosphere.

It can be a fellowship meal. It can be in our living room. It can be in a communion service, but there needs to be that intimacy and that love flowing and that opening our hearts one to another.

It was the last one for the Lord Jesus. He wasn't going to experience one like this ever again in his earthly body, and it was symbolic. We have this, take, eat.

This is my body. This is my blood, which was in a prophetic way, which will be shed for you. It was symbolic of Christ's death, so the eternal death angel would pass over.

It was the Passover feast that they kept there, and he had that last one, which brought the fulfillment of what happened back in the wilderness, or back in Egypt, when the death angel passed over because the blood was applied to the doorpost and the lintels of the door. Now you have the reality of it. Here sat the one shedding the blood.

He had the communion service also there at the end of it, but the whole thing was put together there in a beautiful way. Truth was given. Take, eat, this is my body.

The twelve were being brought along to understand. The blood, drink ye all of it. Peter was told that he needed to be converted and strengthen his brethren.

He had a horrible experience to come upon him that night on his fleshly side, which he did not have the power of the Holy Spirit dwelling in him in a continual way like he did later, and you see a great change in the man's life after he did get that power in Acts chapter 1. We'll see that later on. They washed feet. In the upper room, they literally washed feet.

The Lord Jesus took a basin of water and sat down and washed the disciples' feet and commanded that that's what you should do to one another. Peter, of course, had his impulsive ways, thought, no, I don't want to be just my feet washed. Lord, while you're washing, why don't you wash me all over? But Jesus said that's not necessary.

He that is washed saved not to wash his feet. So once you're washed from your sins, then you just need to wash your feet because it's symbolic in humility, and there's a real meaning in it. If you've never experienced it, you have missed something there.

They sung a hymn there, very, very important, that in a time of intimate fellowship that we sing together, it should be an intimate part of the local church life. I do not believe it has to be in the full accuracy of all the notes and all the parts and all of that in order to be a blessing and to be a joyful experience. But, brethren, I also believe it's worth doing, do it right.

Now, don't give too much attention to how correct you can sing because if you do that, you'll take away the spirit of it. But, oh, it's good to sing together. Oh, it's a joyful thing.

I mean, you men are an inspiration that everybody wants to hear in the building here, I believe, that are around, you know, just to hear that wonderful, voluminous sound coming forth when about 400 people are sitting together and are united in that way and sing together all in harmony with each other. And the whole thing of singing in harmony and in melody has a beautiful illustration of how the body is supposed to work, harmony and melody, based on a hymn. And then, of course, they went out to the crucifixion.

Now, the other thing I wanted to mention is that Judas left it. And that's a very interesting thing, too. You know, John speaks about it, that they went out from us.

It was evident that they were not of us. If they would have been of us, they no doubt would have continued with us. But now, because they went out, it was very evident that they were not with us.

That is also something that should happen in the intimate church fellowship. We cannot depend that that will always purge the rebel out, because we have much, much Scripture concerning church discipline, and sometimes we literally have to do it, are commanded to do it, like in 1 Corinthians 5 and Romans 16 and so on. But nevertheless, I can see that when there is openness and transparency and intimacy, oh, the sinner gets uncomfortable, dusty, can't handle it.

And the greater the intimacy, the greater he gets uncomfortable and can't handle it. And the reason so many sinners can sit in our service is, I believe, it's because something is not the way it ought to be in the love and the intimacy of the brotherhood. I have experienced that in a literal way.

I remember the spectators that came around when we started over 25 years ago, and it seemed like after a while they just couldn't handle it and they were gone. And later on you found out what was back behind there and the kind of life they lived, and it all made sense. It got too hot for them.

Preaching the Word of God, saints loving each other makes sinners normally uncomfortable, and there's a few that have hardened themselves enough that they can put on a show and fool us some of the time, but many times it also manifests and it has to go out. And they perched out there. Now if we go over to Acts chapter 1, we notice that all this took place.

They went out to the garden. The betrayal took place. The Jews took him down with some Roman soldiers there to be tried.

And as was spoken, the shepherd was smitten and the sheep scattered. Peter made his denial and it was a mess there for a while. But after he resurrected three days later, and they were together questioning and wondering and kind of in obscurity for fear of the Jews, Jesus shows up in the midst of them, and about 500 witnessed his resurrection, and you have all of that take place.

And then finally, 40 days later, his ascension took place and they were out there and they were gathered around, and all at once he ascended up and there were some beautiful words spoken there. And as soon as that was over and he went out of sight, guess what happened? Back to the upper room. Of course it was commanded that that's what should happen.

They should go back and tarry and wait for the promise of the Father, the Comforter, the Holy Spirit to be poured out. And so we have them going back there, and we notice there that the disciples were there, and now only 11 of them. They began to pray, it seems there, and again had that intimate fellowship.

They had the women there with them. Let me underline that one. Some brethren can hardly pray in the presence of women, or women in the presence of men, that's not right.

There ought to be enough of brotherhood and sisterhood amongst us that we can pray together. In all purity. They did it there, and I don't believe in this isolationism so much that the women just take care of the babies and the children and talk about the gardens and not about the things of God.

We need to bring our women along and let them experience the fervor of the men. There are many of them that long for it and wish they could just attend the prayer meeting that you men have, but you don't let them come. That's not that way in the upper room.

They ordained another one to take Judas' place. Mary was there. There were no partitions there.

In fact, there were 120, and I don't know who the 120 were, but I like to think that Mary and Martha and Lazarus, who was resurrected, were there. Maybe the blind men, you know, and some of the lame that were healed, and the deaf, and maybe even some of the demons cast out of them and all that, you know, that had believed on Him. And that is a wonderful experience, but I know there were genuine people that were together there.

That is evident. But the next thing we find out, the Bible says in Acts chapter 1 there and 2, that they were together in one accord. And that is so important when we look at church life, that we have that oneness, that one accord, not discord, but accord.

You know the difference? There is a great difference. I like my Amish background experience in teamwork, and I many times in my church experience wish I could put some people just for the experience on a disc or on a hair or something, and have a team of four or five or six horses and run them for a day, and get some of the lessons of what has to happen in teamwork. Accord.

All pulled together in one direction for one given thing. I had an experience of a young boy. I was pretty young yet when I was sitting on the disc, and I had a rambunctious young horse on the outside.

And the whole back track was a little too long, and he was a strong horse, just a young fellow. And I turned around down at the end, and he was at the outside, and he had to run a little faster than all the rest. And he got to going, and he pushed them all five horses all back around on top of the disc.

I had to jump off for my life. And there they stood inside the disc, all tangled up and everything into each other's traces and stuff. My father saw something awful had happened from the barn, and came out, and we had unhitched the whole thing, and untangled the mess, and shortened that pull back strap.

But he was so powerful and so bulldog, he said he just moved everything in a circle right back on top of me, or headed on top of the equipment. And you know, that's what happens in church life. There are so many men that have no idea how to work in a team.

They don't know that when fathers are pulling at a given speed, that they have to either speed up or slow down a little. They don't have any idea how to do that. And it's a great necessity that we understand what accord is, and not a discord.

Do it in music, and you see the effects. Somebody tones in a discord instead of in harmony and in unity and accord with each other. But these were together.

And perhaps the Lord had touched them or ministered to them, especially the twelve, which seemed to be kind of in leadership in the group, especially Peter, that they would have been with him three and a half years, and they were taught by the Lord. And that's what brings accord, being taught by the Lord, being led of the Holy Spirit in unity and oneness together, not being filled with the philosophies of religion, not being still in our old tradition, but coming out and following the Word of God through the Spirit of God, and that automatically by itself brings accord. But we must be able to leave the past and leave traditions.

There are some good traditions we don't have to throw off. I acknowledge that we cannot totally throw away maybe all the traditions that some of us have been brought up that it's more difficult, but the ones that will not bend and will not be brought together must go. Love flowed.

You look at this scene. It was just a beautiful scene. I believe love flowed.

They had about ten days of it there together, a lot of time to pray and a lot of time to talk over things of the past, and they just were told to wait, and they waited it out, and they just went day after day there, and I don't know if they went home overnight and came back again the next day or what it was, but they just prayed, sang maybe, loved one another, and waited for the promise. They were all together. There was supplication.

There was patient waiting. Matthias was chosen there. Peter had led out, and they were all in one court, in one place, in that upper room, and the greatest thing that ever happened happened in the church life.

And I feel many times, there are so many reasons, so many hindrances, hindrances that we will not get ourselves in line in that way, and that's why I don't think it's happening. And the heaven doesn't come down. The spirit doesn't fall like it should.

I don't believe this is ever repeated again. This was the great initiation when the Comforter came to dwell in men's hearts, and it is never to be duplicated in that same way. I mean, their heads were on fire, so to speak, cloven tongues of fire came down and lit on them all.

And I mean, they were on fire, and they were unified, and they were ready to go to evangelize Jerusalem, and then ultimately the world. But in little ways, the church of Jesus Christ needs to have those upper room fellowships, and needs to have that intimacy, and needs to have that fellowship, and needs to have that one accord, and needs to have supplication, and needs to be together, and they need to pull together, and go together in the same direction, in the same way, for the same cause. And often that's not happening.

And what happened after that is an amazing thing, too. Peter went down there, being appointed of God for that purpose, I believe, as we said back in Matthew chapter 16. Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God, remember? And he got up, beckoned with the hand, went down.

Jerusalem was full of Passover people. Seventeen nations were represented there. The whole place was crowded with people in the streets.

And Peter beckoned with the hand, and he began to preach the gospel. And that's the primary thing that should come out of intimacy of church fellowship. The gospel of Jesus Christ should be preached.

He laid the axe through the tree, like John the Baptist had prophesied would happen. He put the blame where it belonged, as far as the crucifixion of the Lord Jesus. And immediately the opposition and persecution started, and they threatened him, if you don't stop this, we're going to put you in prison and all that.

And Peter just rejoiced and went on, and it kept right on going. And 3,000 people got saved and baptized, and they turned the city upside down. And we have great boldness there.

Spoke out against sin, I believe. They lived on a cutting edge, and I think that's very important that we see. But it doesn't just happen.

It comes in the heels of first the young among us and the newly converted to have intimacy of fellowship and learn from one another and from God and from His Word, and we learn to blend our hearts together.

We all know, or I think we do, or we should know, that that corporate togetherness increases the power of the work done. Let me say it again.

Corporate togetherness, whether it be in prayer or in mission work or church life, increases the amount of work that gets done. And without it, just very little happens. I tell you, we barely just keep going as a family.

We sit there by ourselves and really make hardly any dent in the needs of society around us. Well, we could go on and see how they went everywhere preaching the gospel, and that's one of the things I like. It seemed to be an everyman evangelist concept, and they had cultural flexibility, and the tongues were understood in each language, and, I mean, it brought them in from all 17 nations, and just amazing things happened as a result of that Upper Room experience.

Now, I'd like to go through, if I can very quickly, at least a portion of it, and give you some examples of a church covenant. Now, we do have membership, very softly, I would say that. We don't have a real hard line.

We don't cause people to sign their life away when they join us, but we do ask them to come forward here. First of all, we, as elders, may have a meeting with them to see where they're going. Like one brother called me this morning and just had that discussion with me, a little bit concerning of it.

And his way of putting it was, we want the people to walk the way we walk, the same way we walk. We're not interested in somebody pulling in a complete opposite or different direction. That doesn't work in church life.

And I'm not for signing your life away, but I am for a brotherhood commitment. If you don't like the word membership, then please take the brotherhood commitment, or covenanting together, that a whole group of people are able to pull together like a team of horses to get an implement through the field, because it's a hard pull these days. So, I would just like to go through this.

This was brought into a leadership seminar, I think, back in the mid-90s, and I happened to find it again here, but it just speaks again to this whole subject. I just feel we have been so allergic to it, and so the pendulum has swung the other way, because we got burnt. I mean, some of us have had bad experiences out there, and took us years to fully overcome it, and all the wounds of our heart, I know that.

And I went through it myself. But there still comes a time you've got to come back home to the truth, and follow the word of God, and live it out. A church covenant example I'd like to give you in a very practical way.

I should finish my story. We then have, after we meet with them, and find out whether, yes, we agree with you brothers, we agree with you doctrinally, and we ask the question, do you disagree with anything that we're teaching? We have a little confession of faith that outlines some of the basic tenets of the way we believe, and we ask them to read that, and feel free to bring up any questions if you don't understand something. Then we finally ask them to come before the church, and to make a testimony concerning their new birth experience, and their desire to be and work with the body.

And then we let it open to any brothers questioning them, if they don't feel clear with their spirit, or their testimony, or their walk. But they are certainly allowed to bring it up to them personally, or come to us ministry, and say they have a question, they're not clear. If we don't hear anything, in a week or two, we

announce their reception into the church, and we welcome them, gather around them afterwards, individually or however, and welcome them into the church.

That's how we do it. And then, you're inside. You're a part of the body.

You're eligible for office. You can vote. You can cast your voice in brothers meetings.

And we know where you are. But so many are just spectators, and just following from afar, or they're just in there. And to sit there for years, and never make a commitment, and never be a part of a body, when all those scriptures speak about being members one of another.

And I find many of them even try to draw all the benefits out of the church they can, but don't ask me to do nothing, and never be committed. Because I got burned once, and I'm not getting burned again. It's not right.

It's not right. Church Covenant. Having been led by the Spirit of God, to receive the Lord Jesus as our Savior, and having been baptized in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.

And that's another thing we like to see. If there never was a water baptism, at that point, we believe that should take place there. But we do not teach that baptism is the entrance into the church.

And the reason we don't, even though the 3,000 were baptized that day, and added unto the church, we have many other examples that they weren't. And we feel many times, baptism is eligible upon a new birth experience. But a making a Church Covenant, and a commitment of brotherhood is not yet ready at that point.

And so we have divided that, and we feel very good about that, that we will baptize them upon their confession of faith, and let them study the church, its doctrine, its beliefs and practices, and then make, in faith, their request to be a member. We're criticized for that by various groups, but that's how we do that. And we do that because of the Philippian jailer, the Ethiopian eunuch, Cornelius, and different ones that were baptized upon confession of faith, and were not added to the church at Jerusalem, or made to move there, you know, in order to be a member of a church, of the church there.

We do now, in the presence of God, in this assembly, most solemnly and joyfully, enter into covenant with one another, as one body in Christ. I talked to a man on the phone the other day, and he said, and he's just resisting this whole thing, you know, I follow God. Sounds good, doesn't it? But I question whether you will truly follow God.

You know, we get so eccentric, so off-center, and so extreme many times. You know that? Being alone breeds extremism, because we don't have the balancing effect of our brothers around us to trim us a bit, and bring us into order, and show us our needs that we're so blind to, so often, naturally, we're blind to our own needs, and our own faults often, and have somehow exonerated ourselves from it. But in the brotherhood it comes out, and is addressed, and we grow thereby.

So we enter into covenant with one another, as one body in Christ. We pledge ourselves, here it would say, by the help of the Holy Spirit, to follow Jesus Christ as individuals, as families, and as a local church assembly. In that order, I would say.

You first need to seek the face of God yourself, and get a relationship with God. Don't try and join a group, and have them try to convert you. It's alright to attend evangelistic meetings, or church services, in order to hear the gospel.

But the church is not necessarily, in its membership, a hospital for people, for sick sinners. It's a place to bring them in, to hear the gospel. But as far as the church is concerned, it's to be a pure body of believers.

We pledge ourselves, by the help of the Holy Spirit, to follow Jesus Christ as individuals, and families, and as a local church assembly. To base our doctrine, and the pattern of our lives, upon the word of God alone. That's very important.

I know a lot of churches abuse their authority. I know a lot of churches bring, extra biblical revelation in, and try to get you to do things, that's not even hinted of in the scripture. Just because they've decided it.

And that's not right. The church, and you, as an individual, all of us need to work together, to keep it based on the word of God. Alone, he says here.

To impose no requirements, of doctrine or life, upon one another, beyond what can be painfully demonstrated, from scripture. Or plainly, I'm sorry. Plainly demonstrated from scripture.

Sometimes it's painful too, yes. To allow our consciences, to be bound only by the word and spirit. I've been parts of churches, and organizations in the past.

You know, they've decided, they want to be a witness, to a certain group of people. So they want everybody, they've tried to force everybody, to have a given standard, or a given direction, to be a witness to that one group. That's not what the Bible teaches.

The Bible teaches a breaking down of the middle wall, between the Jew and the Gentile, and being one in Christ. And the great example is, when Peter preached in Acts 2, he preached to 17 nations, and languages. And I'm sure the culture was different.

I don't have a doubt in my mind, that they all had Jerusalem dress, or culture. But you can ascribe to modesty and godliness, without being all exactly one pattern. We believe in unity, but we do not believe in uniformity.

To put everybody in a uniform, and make them wear that uniform, is not taught in the Bible. And wasn't practiced in the early church. And wasn't practiced in the book of Acts.

I have no hide nor hair of it. Hats, bonnets, socks, pocket books, shawls, cars painted all the same direction. Those things are not in the Bible.

And I believe it takes away, from what God intended the church to be. Because He intended it to be culturally flexible, to reach many people. And we have just had such a joy, to see people of Serbian descent, or Spanish descent, or Hutterite, or Oler, or Amish, or Baptist, or Catholic, to come together, and actually be able to be in one accord together, according to the Spirit and Word of God.

I am convinced that's what God's heart is. I felt it in prayer, and in meditation many times. I just know that I know that God wants us to go that way.

And I think God has borne witness to it over the years, by so many different cultures being represented here today. God bless every one of you from wherever you're from. It is so beautiful.

And I'm sure here in the end times, God really wants to get rid of the fog, and have New Testament churches, as I see the revival of the New Testament church. I believe God is in it with all His heart. And allow our consciences to be bound only by the Word and Spirit.

And I would take that a little further. I believe our consciences can be affected by our brotherhood. It's like Brother Denny has said, and I've said two different times, when all the brethren who you believe are truly born again, and walking with God, are saying, Brother, you need to take a look at this area in your life.

We need to take a look. We need to be bound in our conscience, to take a look at that area in our life. Not say, God told me, and God showed me, and that's all I care about.

That's not a right spirit. We also pledge to be worshipers of God in private, family, and corporate settings. All three are important, and should not conflict one with another, if we're in scriptural and biblical churches.

To instruct one another from the Word, and to maintain, this is important, a teachable spirit. That is so important. Some of us just have difficulty with maintaining a teachable spirit, concerning our homes, and you want to hit the hot one? Our children.

When they touch our children, look out. And we react so many times, just because that happened. That our children got, my son got touched, and my daughter got accused of not being, of treating the other girls wrong, and all that, and I mean we're on a defensiveness, before we have even investigated the issue.

Carnal hearts do those things. Maintain a teachable spirit. And I believe we need to take it all the way to the doctrinal field.

Our brother David Cooper, had a very vivid experience, that he has given his testimony of numerous times, and experience here when he came. And he finally came to the place, he ran into this thing so often, that he finally decided to submit his doctrine, to the group of men that he loved, and cared about, and saw walking with God. Ouch! Can you do that? It paid off tremendously in the life of him and his family.

Ask him about it, if you have, if you question. But there comes a time, when we know that the church is, walking with God, and the men are prospering, and there's godliness there, that I believe it's right for us, to even submit our doctrine one to another. Especially when it's a lot of hair splitting of words, you know, and those kind of things are just theological concepts, and ideas that are a little folly, as to pin down exactly what they mean.

To seek and to serve God, and one another through our spiritual gifts. The lonely man out there, does not have the gifts of the spirit like he ought to. It's impossible for him to experience.

Some apostles, and prophets, and teachers, and evangelists, and pastors, and all that. It's not possible until you get into a body. And you will miss out, on those prophetic, and wonderful teaching gifts, that you need for your own spiritual growth.

To meet together regularly, for mutual encouragement of our Christian walk, and again, may I say so much, so more as you see the day approaching. To practice Christian stewardship, of time, and talents,

and treasures. I hope I'll be able to speak of this again, but it is so necessary for your teenagers.

You have no idea what you do to them, when you pull them away from everything. And if it's a liberal movement out there, and you're in a place there is nothing, you have to do it. I understand.

But consider relocating, so you can have some interaction, and fellowship, and someone to marry. That they don't run out in the world, like so many are when they are about 24, 26. They've had enough of being under dad's thumb, and he provides no fellowship.

I had a call last night, over here in the dining room from Canada, where a brother called me, a dear friend of mine, and brother, and his oldest 19 year old daughter, got taken away by another church group, and brainwashed, pretty much, because they believe they are the one true church, and if it's not them, it's nobody, and you know, everybody else is on a lower level somewhere, as kingdom children maybe, and he said, what do I do? I said, do you have opportunity yet to meet with her, for a couple of hours, and he said, yes, I can do that. I said, get her to your house, and the first thing you do, is in a low and humble way, confess that you failed there, and acknowledge you have not provided, what you need to provide for. And then, I think it's right for you to warn her, about the one true church, and that doctrine, that that's not a biblical doctrine, but I said, more than that, you cannot do much more than that, you have basically, not provided it for her, moved from here to there, and been alone for too many years, and the girl wants fellowship, and she doesn't care so much about the doctrine, she just wants love and fellowship, and acceptance, and that's what happens, and they're led into the wrong place.

To meet together regularly, for mutual encouragement of the Christian walk, prayer meeting, and Sunday morning service, should not be an option, except when we're sick. It just should not be an option. I just have to tell you, I am troubling, I am troubled, at the amount of traveling, that's done in Sunday mornings.

You know, I was taught totally different, you start home on Sunday afternoon, after the church services, when you're away, you don't go Sunday mornings, so you get home, and rest, and get a good night's sleep, before Monday morning, going to work. We drove till midnight, if we needed to, rather than miss a Sunday morning service, or one o'clock in the morning, or two, and still went to work the next day. It's just the way we were taught, and the way we were brought up, but I just see this looseness up, just riding Sunday mornings regularly, and missing the church service.

And it once is one thing, you know, but when it happens so many times, is where the problem comes, that we don't see the need, for mutual encouragement, in our Christian walk. To practice Christian stewardship, of our time, talents, and treasures. I'll speak probably more of that tomorrow.

We further pledge, to be devoted to one another, in brotherly love, to remember one another in prayer, to aid one another in sickness and distress. It's amazing, the young couples that are in distress, with four and five children, and have no clue, who to call to come and help them, a thousand miles away, from a true church, that they'd have confidence in. To maintain a humble spirit, and defer to one another in the Lord, and to avoid all gossip, and to be slow to take offense.

I think it is very important, to commit ourselves before God, to not be offended. And that's hard sometimes to do, but don't just at the drop of a hat, in that somebody crossed your path, you run, right out of the church, and say, that's enough for me. I ain't going back there.

They stepped on my toe, after the services, or in the message. Don't do that. That's a terrible mistake.

You only have to go through it again, somewhere else, till finally you face your easy offense. But be always ready for reconciliation, and mindful of the rulers, of our Savior, to secure it without delay. One brother told me yesterday, he had a painful and hurtful thing happen to him.

You know, by personal admonition, that come his way, and he said, but I'm not running. I'm not moving. I love the church too much, to submit ourselves to the discipline, and government of the local church.

I'm really hoping, in the next two services, to speak a little bit about, the value of church discipline, the need for it, and government in the local church assembly. But that is very important, that we are able to, and you know, are able to do that. You will not face submission, until you disagree.

You know, you can say, well I have no problem submitting, that's fine, as long as you agree, with everything in the program. But when you don't, that's when the rubber meets the road, and the test is on. Don't fail the test, when that comes.

And I'm saying all that, in light of the apostasy. You know that, I understand the apostasy, as Brother Denny already spoke about. There are many times, we must leave, and must take our families, and run.

But we're speaking, in the confines of the New Testament, what we believe, doctrine is spiritually sound church. Initially, submit ourselves, to the discipline and government, of the local church assembly. Initially, to the men of the assembly, and council.

And when God so provides, to biblically qualified eldership, to in all things, seek the purity, peace, and unity of the church. We pledge ourselves, finally, to advance the gospel, and kingdom of Christ, in this world. And if we do that, the way we ought to, we want support from each other, rather than the opposite.

To be mindful of the church, beyond our own assembly, and to seek to live out our unity, with the church of Christ, in every place. We try to bless other places, of other churches, that are faithful, too. To demonstrate the mercy of God, through relief of the poor.

To seek the salvation, of those near and far, who still need the Savior. And to adorn our profession of faith, in Christ, with a life of love, and obedience, that brings praise, to our Lord. End of the covenant.

Rather detailed, but my, it's packed full. Many, many good things. That brings our service, our time here, to a close.

But the answer, obviously, to me is, should a person, be a part of a local church fellowship, and enjoy the value, and value it very highly, the answer is, a resounding yes. And may God help us, to build those, provide those, make them happen, as fast as we can, and as much as we can, in our time that we have left. God bless you.

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