

Crisis in Fellowship

by Paris Reidhead

The sermon explores the crisis in fellowship within the early church, emphasizing the importance of honesty, the role of the Holy Spirit, and the necessity of a personal relationship with Christ for true salvation.

Duration: 1:00:25

Scripture: Matthew 6:33, Acts 5:1-11, Acts 5:13, Ephesians 4:25, Philippians 2:3, Colossians 3:23, Hebrews 4:13

Topics: "Fellowship"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker reflects on a scene from history where the early church experienced great awe and fear of God. He emphasizes that the message they proclaimed was the message God wanted proclaimed, which is of utmost importance. The speaker also mentions a re-evaluation among evangelical thinkers regarding the message to be proclaimed in modern times. He highlights the need for a genuine relationship with God, being filled with the Holy Spirit, and loving God with our whole hearts. The sermon encourages listeners to reflect on their own beliefs and relationship with Jesus.

Transcript

Would you turn please to Acts chapter 5. This morning we saw the fellowship in crisis. What they did when a problem arised, having all things in common, they shared the crisis, even as they had shared the life of the Lord Jesus, and bringing them out of death into life, so in the time of need they shared this common woe, this common danger, and common grief. Now this evening we're going to see crisis in the fellowship, just the next chapter, chapter 5. What happened when a problem arose, not outside of the fellowship, but within? What was God's provision to protect this common life, this sharing, this participation? Now we're building our thinking around a word, and the word is fellowship, or communion, or sharing, or participation.

All these English expressions are equated with the one Greek word koinonia. It's a wonderful word, one with which we're endeavoring to become acquainted, because we find that we have a portion of what the Lord gave us. In Acts 2.42, our key text, we found that we have the Apostles' Doctrine, it's before us, it's here, we have the book, but it says they continued steadfastly in the Apostles' Doctrine in fellowship, in koinonia.

What did this mean? I think that when we find out what it meant, we have in large measure both the key to the revelation of the glory of Christ, and the nurturing and the maturing of believers. I shall read several verses in this fifth chapter. You follow carefully, because the scripture is in one sense its own best commentary.

But a certain man named Ananias, oh, let's go back, shall we, to Barnabas and see exactly how this developed. And Joseph, who by the Apostles was surnamed Barnabas, which is being interpreted the son of Consolation, a Levite, and of the country of Cyprus, having land, sold it, and brought the money and laid it at the Apostles' feet. Somebody else, another man by the name of Ananias, with Sapphira, his wife, sold a possession and kept back part of the price, his wife also being privy to it, and brought a certain part and laid it at the Apostles' feet.

But Peter said, Ananias, why has Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost and to keep back part of the price of the land? While it remains, was it not thine own? And after it was sold, was it not in thine own power? Why hast thou conceived this thing in thine heart? Thou hast not lied unto man, but unto God. And Ananias, hearing these words, fell down and gave up the ghost, and great fear came on all them that heard these things. And the young man arose, wound him up, carried him out, and buried him.

And it was about the space of three hours later when his wife, not knowing what was done, came in. And Peter answered unto her, tell me whether you sold the land for so much? And she said, yes, for so much. And Peter said unto her, how is it that ye have agreed together to tempt the Spirit of the Lord? Behold, the feet of them which have buried thy husband are at the door, and shall carry thee out.

Then fell she down straightway at his feet, and yielded up the ghost. And the young man came in and found her dead, and carrying her forth, buried her by her husband. And great fear came upon all the church, and upon as many as heard these things.

And by the hands of the apostles were many signs and wonders wrought among the people, and they were all with one accord in Solomon's porch. And of the rest durst no man join himself to them. But the people magnified them, and believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes, both of men and women, insomuch that they brought forth the sick into the streets, and laid them on beds and couches, that at the least the shadow of Peter passing by might overshadow some of them.

There came also a multitude out of the cities, around about unto Jerusalem, bringing sick folks, and them which were vexed with unclean spirits. And they were healed, everyone. May God bless to our hearts this word, and cause us to lay hold upon it.

Now, in order to understand this, we have to go back to the context. We will resort to summing up what we said this morning, that people have been drawn one to another by their love for Christ. They have found each other in their mutual need of life, and this life is in the Son, and their fellowship therefore is in the Son.

They've gathered unto the Lord Jesus Christ. He it is that has drawn them to himself, and because he's drawn them to himself, he has drawn them one to another. When Peter and John were released from the authorities of the temple, they went to their own company.

This group of men and women, of which they were but two, their own company, for they had been made partakers of Christ, and they shared him with those who also knew him. They have asked for one thing from the Lord. They didn't ask for protection.

They didn't ask for beings to be spared from suffering. They didn't ask to escape persecution. They didn't ask deliverance from death.

They weren't interested in that. Isn't it amazing that the only thing that concerned them was that they would honor the Lord Jesus Christ, boldly proclaiming his name and affirming their faith, showing at no time cowardice or in any wise reflecting upon him. They cried out to God to exalt the Lord Jesus.

They determined that God would so control them and so fill them and possess them, that with all boldness they might speak his word and they might declare his truth. Well, God could honor this prayer. He did honor it.

And they knew what to expect him to do. Stretch forth thine hand to heal. Let signs and wonders be done by the name of thy holy child, Jesus.

There's several things that are patent here. They're very clear. First, we must understand that the message that they proclaimed was the message that God wanted proclaimed.

The only reason he could confirm it with signs and wonders was because it was the message he wanted proclaimed. And this is of tremendous importance. During the past 15, 20 years, there's been a reevaluation on the part of evangelical thinkers in respect to just what is the message that we're to proclaim to our generation.

It's not to be critical or negative to say that to a large degree, we've lost contact with the unsaved community. They have felt that we evangelicals are a small, decreasing minority of obscurantists that are out of step with our day and generation, that what we hold to and believe is irrelevant and immaterial has no significance in this busy 20th century. And to some degree, I suppose we have earned this because so much of our proclamation has been humanism in another guise.

Humanism is such a subtle thing because to some degree, human interest marks every page of the Bible. Everything God says, he says for the good of man as well as for his own glory. But there's a philosophical issue here.

About 100 years ago, humanism became a dominant philosophy, namely this, that the end of all being and all existence is the happiness of man. Man's happiness, man's pleasure became paramount. It was another type of hedonism, if you please, that man exists for pleasure, that God exists for man's pleasure, and that all things are to contribute to man's pleasure.

But it wasn't just in a sensual way. It touched every area and part of life. The liberals about 1850 said, we don't know about heaven, we don't know about hell, but we know you've got to live through 70 years of time.

Of course, it wasn't 70 then, 50, 60, 70, as the age span has increased. We can't say much about what's going to happen after you die, but we think it's terribly important that you should make a place in the scheme of your life for religion. You come to us on Sunday morning and let us read some poetry to you, and give you some platitudes, and teach you a few little axioms to live by, if you really wish to.

But come anyway, and we'll do you good. It'll be a little spice and fragrance in your otherwise rather drab life. Come to church because it'll make you happy while you're alive.

Now, essentially, this was the message of liberalism. Then it had political overtones and social overtones. Pulpit became a mean for social reform, doing away with the slums and getting milk to the children, all of which was important, but a travesty on the scripture because these things were made an end instead of a

byproduct, as the word of God indicates they should be.

And there were a group of people that reacted against this. And they were called fundamentalists because where they said, we believe the Bible teaches hell and heaven. It teaches that Jesus Christ is the virgin born son of God, that he lived a sinless life, and he died under vicarious atoning death, and that he was bodily raised from the dead.

We hold these things to be self-evident. We hold these to be the basic essentials of scripture. We hold these to be the fundamentals of our faith, and to them we adhere.

Well, there was a dividing. Denominations divided through the late 1900s or 1800s rather. There was the division going on through the Methodist Church and the Presbyterian and the Baptist, just splitting right down.

And of course, it came to its fullest in our lifetime. The last 40 years, some of you 50, 60 years, have seen the full extent of this division that's just gone right through and has divided on every side and every hand. And so it was a simple step for the fundamentalists to say, we hold to these things.

People that had been born of God, people that had had a real experience with God, had met him in a transforming relationship. This is wonderful. They had clear frame of reference by which they could unite.

We believe these things to be so. It was but just one step to say, you become a Christian if you believe these things to be so. Do you see the difference? The first group in 1850, shall we say, 1875, had become a Christian on the basis of what had been taught and what had been preached.

Repentance and faith and the new birth and an inward revolution, a transformation affected by the spirit of God in sovereign grace and power. The next step was, if you hold these things to be true, you can automatically assume that you've repented, assume you've been born again, and assume that you have the witness of the spirit. And so the next step from that was, there was salvation was reduced down to a plan.

And to become a Christian was to ascent to a plan. And then the next step was to our generation, when for such a long time it has been, up until I say it began to be restudied by men some 20 years ago. Well, I was instructed, or at least I inferred from my instruction, that all that was needed for anyone to go to heaven was to say once that Jesus was Lord somehow.

And I can remember doing personal work on the bus stops, speaking to a man next to me, a stranger, if you were to miss this bus and be killed, would you go to heaven or hell? Well, I don't know, would you like to know? Well, sure, everybody'd like to know. And then open my New Testament and flip to a verse and say, see, do you believe that? Well, sure. Believe this? Yes.

Believe this? All right. Now, if you're willing to really accept that and say you believe it, put your hand in mine. And then when he'd extend his hand, say, now, brother, I'll meet you in heaven.

God bless you, you've been saved. And swing off on the bus, he to go his way and I mine. But I had been taught that this could substitute for meeting God.

This was the kind of personal work in which I was instructed and when on Sunday morning in missions chapel or report hour, I would tell how I had done this on the bus stop, there would be amens, brother,

from among the other enthusiastic students that had probably done similarly, if not that week and other weeks. And it was reduced down to this. And the consequence was that the church of the Lord Jesus was invaded by people that had the head knowledge or some concept of a plan, however nebulous and incomplete it might be, that had been baptized, that had said they'd accepted Jesus.

But then we had statements coming out such as the one R.G. Lee made that I've repeated to you, who said that in his estimation, based on 40 years observation, probably no more than one out of 10 of the people of his denomination, the Southern Baptists, gave Bible evidence of ever having been born of God. Well, think of that, one out of 10. And there's 8 million.

That means 800,000. And then he said, if I have made an error because the preacher's gasp, then I put it too high. It's probably far less.

And others, Andrew Blackwood in his book, in his chapter in the volume, Contemporary Evangelical Thought and Contemporary Evangelism, cites two authorities to which I referred, stating that there were one, I think 17, it's been some time since I read it, and the other 22% of the members of evangelical churches not devout liberals, but churches such as ours that gave Bible evidence of having been born of God. Well, I do not wish to argue with the point. The point is that men have been concerned, they've been burdened, because it's been possible for people to substitute a plan for a person.

And a plan doesn't save, and a scheme of doctrine doesn't save, and a scripture verse doesn't save, and a decision doesn't save. No one is saved apart from these things, but salvation is not to be equated with a scripture verse, nor a plan, nor a system of doctrine. Salvation is a person.

It's a person. Salvation isn't something a person died to send. It's something that he died to bring, to become when he, to bring when he comes.

And if that person isn't there, salvation isn't there, because he can't send it apart from himself. It is Christ who is our life, and he that hath the Son hath life. Not he that hath the verse that says he that hath the Son.

His life isn't in the verse, life is in the Son. And the verse tells you about the Son, tells you what the Son did, tells you what you've done, but it doesn't, it doesn't substitute for him. Now, the characteristic fact of this church is that everyone in it had him.

He had come. He had come in forgiveness. He had come in pardon.

He'd come in justification, regeneration. But we must understand something else. Everyone in this church also knew the fullness of the Holy Spirit.

Because at this time, in the early church, there wasn't any separation. There was a separation in terms of time and sequence, but that was very, very small. It's the separation that means it has to happen in succession.

Yesterday, we had a marriage ceremony. I said, do you say I do? And there was proper response. And I could say, I now pronounce you man and wife.

Now, there was a separation between the I wills and the pronouncing of the man and wife. But it was a separation that was just in sequence of utterance. And so it is that there's a separation here.

Peter said, repent and be baptized, every one of you, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. For the promise is to you, to your children, to them that are far off, even to as many as the Lord our God shall call. And we find in the Philadelphia Confession of Faith, which was the Baptist confession of 1624 and 17-something.

Benjamin Franklin printed it, so you know relatively the time. I love that. I wish I could sometime run across an original copy of that.

I'm sure that doesn't exist except in libraries. But I'd love to have a copy of that, one that he printed, of the Philadelphia Confession of Faith. As distinct from the New Hampshire Confession, which came some years later.

But in it, in Article 31, there is the laying on of hands. This is a very interesting chapter. And it was by Baptists now.

It wasn't by the Alliance. We didn't even exist for 150 years after that. This was by the Baptists in Philadelphia, who met together and said, this is what we believe.

And they said, then went ahead to say that after one has been regenerated, they should be taught that not only did Christ die for them, but they died with him. And that when they went into the water of baptism, it wasn't simply to repeat what Christ did, but it was a testimony of their union with Christ in his death, their union with him in his burial, and their union with him in resurrection. That they were reckoning themselves to be crucified and buried and quickened and raised.

Then, following baptism, and before they took of the Lord's Supper, the elders would gather about these that had just been baptized in water and would lay their hands on them. And they cited Ananias coming to Paul and Peter and John going down to Samaria. And Paul at Ephesus.

And the elders would gather and lay their hands on these that had just been baptized for a further impartation of the Holy Spirit. Not for the extraordinary gifts of the Spirit, they specified, but for an impartation of his fullness in life in order that they might be prepared to serve in the church and to witness in the community. Saying, this is the apostolic pattern.

And we are Bible believers. Well, it's very interesting to me that it should have been spelled out so explicitly in the Philadelphia Confession of Faith. And this was actually an inserted chapter over the London Confession of Faith.

But they'd gone back to the word and say, what does the scripture teach? What's the pattern? And they said, saw three things. First, they saw there was to be this matter of identification with Christ as hinged closely to forgiveness and taught by water baptism. And I believe they're absolutely right.

I believe that water baptism is far more than just an acting out in obedience to what Christ did. It's an identification with him. And it ought to be a visualization of our death, burial, and resurrection with him.

And then secondly, they said, being filled with the Spirit of God in the word of God was something more than an individual's own concern. It's a concern to the church. For if people come into the life of the church that have not known this further impartation for life and for service, they're going to have to act in such energy as they possess.

Though forgiven, it will still be natural. And everything in the church that is to be done must be done on that supernatural energy in life. And so they said, the church must enter in.

This is a matter of the church's responsibility. And I believe they were absolutely right. Certainly, Peter and John came down to Samaria.

These were apostles. And I entered into the ministry of Philip, who was a deacon, and prayed and instructed these people in order that they might be prepared for church life. And there was no koinonia, no fellowship of any sort that we could see other than great rejoicing over a mutual experience.

But there was no corporate life until Peter and John came down. Because he who is the corporate life is the spirit of God who is to fill the believer. It's as though we had behind here on the wall a billboard similar to what you see out on Times Square, only conveying the gospel.

Maybe there's 50, 100, 1,000. They say, I've read in the newspaper, that if you stand in the center of Times Square and make a complete circle, you can see over 1 million lights. If you'd like to know how many a million is, just make that circle and see the lights.

You've seen a million. They're there. Well, suppose we had behind me a board filled with lights, bulbs, all of them properly connected and all of them properly put into the sockets.

But for one thing, some of them, some of them haven't been tightened down sufficiently to establish contact. And suppose these lights convey a message. And suppose that just half the lights are on and someone is in the dark reading the message and he can't see what the lights spell without it, just only as it's illuminated.

And half of them go on. Is there a message conveyed? The board has been prepared? The lights have been procured? The current flows? But half of the bulbs aren't tightened into the socket and there's no flow. And so the message is distorted.

It isn't clear. It's not legible. Because the bulbs have not been put in such relationship where they can sustain the flow of energy.

And this, I suppose, is what some who are observers of the Church in our day would say is the case. Not questioning. Questioning, of course, whether many of people actually in membership in churches have been born again.

But in addition to that number that are born again, what percentage have experienced, according to their own testimony, the fullness of the Spirit of God? So we've got to see that in the New Testament, truly repentant. There is cost, great price. In identifying with the Lord Jesus Christ.

Secondly, they had understood identification. They'd been baptized. And thirdly, the Church had entered into them with this, which is prime necessity and basic condition for participation in church life.

They had been brought into an experience of the fullness of the Spirit. All of this, apparently, was prerequisite for understanding of the biblical term koinonia, or sharing, or fellowship. Now, how far have you come? Well, let's establish the first question.

Have you truly repented? Is it your purpose to please God? Have you at some point in your pilgrimage come to the place that the intent of your heart is to please Him? Have you been forgiven of past sins? Do

you know that you're pardoned? Do you have the witness of His Spirit that you have passed from death to life? And that that great sword aimed at your heart was sheathed in His. And you have thus been pardoned of your past sin because Christ died for you. Have you come that far with me? Have you come to the meaning of baptism, death with Christ, crucifixion with Him, burial with Him, resurrection with Him? Well, these are essentials for biblical koinonia.

But what about the other? And perhaps it's the fault of the eldership. It's perhaps it's the fault. I know in my own case, when I saw, and it wasn't easy.

You see, some people are born free and some purchase their freedom with great price, great price. But my heart became so desperately hungry when I saw in the word of God that there is a relationship to Him which is based upon regeneration, which is prerequisite to regeneration. But there is an experience of death to sell and the fullness of the spirit of God.

And I went here and there and asked one and the other and was brushed off one way and brushed off another. It's a lonely, lonely thing, you know. I was in one ditch of dispensational deadness to which I had been drawn early in my Christian life.

My Bible was about the size of a Sunday school quarterly. Matthew was for the Jews. And oh, dear, dear, dear.

I went to Africa with a Bible just about as big as a short quarter in your Sunday school literature. That's all. Ephesians, Philippians, and Colossians and juicy portions of Ephesians that you had to consign to the original one's doom it was written in.

I used to wonder, it seemed such a terrible thing that God had cut down on what he was giving to such a point as he had. But nevertheless, I began to see that I was in one ditch and others with me and some had far more life than I did. And I suppose that as everyone, you meet someone.

Certainly it was true. I'd gone right from Bible school, where I'd been so wrapped up in dispensationalism, to Taylor University. And just about that time, dear John Wengetz.

Why, I wish he could come to New York. John Wengetz, who was instrumental in great revivals in the Methodist church in Angola, in Africa, and in Liberia. And he would come to Taylor Chapel, graduate of Taylor, honored alumnus.

And he would start to tell us about God. And I was sitting then as a senior student right in front. I'd look up at him and listen to him talk and the glory of God was on him and the wonder of the Lord was upon him.

And I just, tears just unbidden run down my cheek. This man had what I had to have or die. And I'd go over and talk with him in his apartment in the dormitory for staying there.

And then he'd start to explain it to me. And I could prove to him that he didn't know what he was talking about and was sufficiently egotistical or something or certainly carnal to do it. Then I'd go back the next day or the next time he spoke and cry again.

Finally, I went over to him and said, Mr. Wengetz, will you do me a favor? Don't try to explain this. Just pray that God will do for me what he's done for you. And then probably when he's done it, I'll understand.

I don't want my mental difficulties to stand in the way because I sense the glory of God is on you in a way that I must know him or I'll die. Just die. I can't go on living knowing that God has something that is as manifest in your life.

Well, it's people that you meet that have met God that change your life. It's an encounter with someone that's been somewhere. People in Samaria never got over the fact that Philip came.

People in Ephesus never got over the fact that Paul came. And you've touched someone along the way, someone whom when you met them and knew them, God was there. You sensed that he was there.

Well, this is what characterized that early church. There were people that had met God. Now, the crisis in the fellowship is this.

And I'm not trying to establish someone. If you come to me afterwards and say, where did Ananias and Sapphira go? I'm going to have to say, yes, I'd like to know. Let's wait till we get to heaven.

We'll go together up to the throne and say, Lord, where'd they go? And if they're there, we'll meet them. And if they aren't, we'll have them explain why. But as far as I'm concerned, this is a problem that's silent, and I'm not going to speculate on it.

The only thing I'm going to say is they didn't stay in church very long when duplicity entered into their heart. Now, I am confident that if God had done to everybody what he did to Ananias and Sapphira, the pew where you're sitting would probably be empty and the pulpit behind which I'm standing at this time would be empty of me at least. For there have been times in all of our pilgrimage when we have made vows and have lied to the Holy Ghost.

Not that we've done it with purpose, but God was here giving to us a principle, a principle that was enabling us to see something of his nature and his character. And we therefore must recognize that it is God's answer to the question, how important is the fellowship to God and to the church? How important is it? What does it mean? Now, everyone that picked up sticks wasn't stoned, and undoubtedly everyone who took some Babylonish garment and wedge of gold wasn't piled under a heap of stones. God gave evidence of his attitude all down the way.

They'll all be dealt with, and no one will escape. But I'm certain in my own heart that this that we've read of Ananias and Sapphira was God's object lesson to me and to you, to enable us to see how serious is the sin of lying to the Holy Ghost first, and how vital it is to keep the fellowship clear of sin. How important it is that there should be transparent honesty, and how absolutely important it is that one should have no ulterior motive in his service.

And we can say that the sin of Ananias and Sapphira is extended whenever anyone performs any service with the thought of keeping back part of the price. That is, something for himself, glory for himself, or honor for himself, or name, or whatever it might be. They wanted something from this.

They wanted to serve God truly, but they wanted something for themselves. So we would not just allow it to be money that's the return from selling property, but any service that has a byproduct for self in it when an eye is not singled to his glory. But the thing that you must see, if you're to understand, is that a crisis is now occurring in the fellowship.

The enemy is seeking to invade and thus destroy the unity of the spirit, and thus destroy, remove the blessing of God, and make it impossible for God to continue to pour out of his spirit upon them. God thereby gives an illustration of how important it is that the fellowship should be kept blessable. But I think if you've thought with me up to this point, you're asking one question.

How did Peter know the amount of money involved in Ananias' sin? How did Peter know? Because it's obvious that Peter did not have to send out an investigating committee to find out. Peter, Ananias brings the money and says, here, Peter, I sold my house for so much, and here's the money. Instead of taking the money, Peter says, no, Ananias, you didn't sell your house for so much.

Why have you lied to the Holy Ghost? You sold yourself a house for so much, and you've kept the rest. Now, the question is, how come Peter didn't deal with this the way we would have had to have dealt with it normally? Say, oh, Ananias, thank you so much. We deeply appreciate that.

Now, Barnabas is not the only son of consolation. We have Ananias, who is another. This is the way it might have been, had it been on the level of the day.

But you see, there was another factor here. Another factor. And that is that in addition to the impartation of the Holy Spirit for fruit and for life and for witness and for service, there were the extraordinary gifts of the Spirit.

And a gift of the Spirit is in operation here. It is the gift of the word of knowledge. Now, I personally believe that the gifts of the Spirit, all nine of them, have been in the church.

They've never been out of the church. As Dr. Tozer said one day, some two or three conferences ago when he was here, if the gifts of the Spirit had not been in the church, the church could never have survived as well as it has to the present. But this is a gift of the Spirit.

It's the gift of the word of knowledge, if I understand the scripture correctly. The Spirit of God is God, not less than God. He is God.

And Peter is filled with the Holy Ghost. And Peter's spirit is clothed upon with the Holy Spirit. And when Peter's spirit is covered and clothed with the Holy Spirit, it's a very simple matter for the Holy Spirit to communicate to Peter something that Peter had not learned by the usual process of either seeing or hearing or feeling and experiencing.

Something is known by Peter that could not have been known by any natural function. No one is told, Peter. No one is related to Peter.

Peter instantly knows, immediately knows, the price and the factors concerning it and the attitude of Ananias and what to say about it. Peter wasn't going to have someone said, look what Peter did to Ananias. Peter didn't do anything to Ananias.

Peter simply anticipated what God was going to do and related to Ananias in advance of its happening what God was going to do and what God did. But you see, this is a gift of the Spirit. And I believe that the extraordinary gifts of the Spirit, the nine gifts of which we've spoken in the past, there are three power gifts and three utterance gifts and three knowledge gifts in the nine that you read in 1 Corinthians 12.

But these are the knowledge gifts whereby they could know something they wouldn't otherwise know. That it was God's intent and purpose that these be in operation. Now, you don't find anything being said about it.

You wouldn't, you'd only know it if you knew from the Old Testament, for instance, the experience of Elijah and the others of the prophets. How they knew, how they knew what to do. You remember the time when the axe was dropped into the river? How did the prophet know what to do to recover the axe? There certainly wasn't any book on it and it was completely contrary to nature.

Cast in a tree and the iron would swim, break the law of that gravitational pull that would draw the iron to the bottom. How did he know? Well, he knew something he could not know except God had told him. And you remember when Gehazi followed Naaman and went to him and said, oh master, you know, my lord has changed his mind.

And he'd like to have those garments. He was a little hasty in sending them away. He took another look at his wardrobe and some of his suits are getting frayed around the cuff and he figured that he's just a little hasty.

Now, if you'd give it to me, I'll be glad to take it to her. Naaman says, oh certainly, here you are. I feel very relieved.

You take it back and tell him I'm so glad he changed his mind. And Gehazi hid it. He came in and served the prophet and said to Gehazi, you went down the road after Naaman.

You stopped him at such and such a corner and you said this to him and you said this to him and you took these garments, so many and the gold so much and you put it there. And Gehazi's eyes begin to bulge, you know, and sort of, you could have brushed them off with a stick. But how's this? How'd this happen? And then the prophet said, do you not think and know that my spirit went with you? Now, what spirit does he speak about? His own? No, he speaks of the Holy Spirit.

You see, God is present. In him we live and we move and we have our being. And since God was where Gehazi was and God was in the prophet, it was a very simple matter for God there to tell the prophet here what was happening there so that he'd know.

You understand, of course, that most of us, did you read this last week's editorial in The Witness about the absentee God? The God who's confined way off up there in heaven. And we have to innovate and invent and develop. You better read it.

It's tremendous. Do you worship a God in whom you live and move and have your being? And do you understand that the normal relationship of a Christian is to be filled with the fullness of God and your spirit covered with the Holy Spirit? This is why the house shook in the previous chapter because you were a people broken before the Lord, broken before each other, utterly sharing the risen Christ. And he was in them and they were in him.

And he was so delighted to have a people that loved him with their whole hearts that he just trembled with joy when he did the whole house shook. That's all it was. It wasn't hard, just the difficulty was that he just restrained himself.

Or if he hadn't, well, I remember years ago being in a prayer meeting with some very zealous young men and one of them, raising his voice to a high pitch, cried, O God, reveal thyself in the fullness of thy glorious. Thou dost reveal thyself in heaven, reveal thyself here. And for a minute, I thought perhaps the Lord would and I began to tremble a little.

And I said under my breath, Lord, he's sincere and earnest, but don't take him at his word because if the Lord revealed himself in any measure here as he did there, we'd all be evaporated and because no man can see him in his essence and live, God is light. We have such a low tolerance for light in these mortal bodies of ours. But you understand that the part of us that's changed now in regeneration is our spirits and the part of us that he fills is the human spirit and the part of us that knows God is the human spirit.

The part that, where we worship, where they worship God, worship him in their spirit. God is spirit and in your spirit, you worship God. And these bodies of ours are, well, they're just convenient tenements, just sort of an address where the Lord can meet with us, but he's not restricted to them.

And when a company of people such as there were here, however many there were, were all in love with the Lord and all meeting him, no wonder the place shook. And so no wonder Peter knew what Ananias paid because you see, God was there. He was there.

He was there when Ananias made the deal. It was such a simple matter for God who was there at the time to tell Peter in whom he was exactly what happened. Peter saw it just the way it happened.

Our Lord had such ministry as this, seeing. You remember, we went to make that hospital call down there at the pool. We're all the sick.

We're waiting for the angel to trouble the water. And as he came in, he didn't speak to this one. Maybe smile, looked at them, pity and love.

But you see, our Lord said I could do nothing of himself. If they had asked him to heal them, he would have because the father said he could heal any that asked him, but they didn't know who he was and they didn't ask him. But finally he went around and he saw one man lying there and he asked the man, will thou be made whole? And the man said, no man did move me.

He said, stand up, took him by the hand. The man stood up and instantly was made whole. And asked about it later.

Our Lord said this, I can only do what I see the father do. Now, I do not know how it doesn't say, but either at the time or previously in prayer, God had given him a vision of something that was going to happen. A situation when he came to that situation, there was the person, he'd seen what had happened previously.

Will thou be made whole? Will the father show me that you're the man that he'll make whole? He knew something that he couldn't have known if it hadn't been communicated by the father. You see, now he was God, yes. But remember this, for the purpose of his ministry, he relinquished the right to act in his essential deity, his son.

And he accepted the limitations of his humanity so that he could be like you. That in all things, he could be like his brethren. And so he said, I do nothing of myself.

I only do what I see the father do. I don't speak of myself. I speak as I receive commandment of the father.

And so I'm saying three things. First, that this fellowship was based upon a relationship with God that we call here normal Christianity. Secondly, that the integrity of the fellowship was of tremendous importance to God, so much, much more so than any individual.

Ananias and Sapphira, as important as they were, were nevertheless expendable when it came to the matter of protecting the integrity of the church. And they were incapable of repentance. This I am confident.

If they had been capable of repentance and change, I am convinced in my own heart, the Lord would have given them opportunity. But he knew their hearts. And so this was his way of illustrating his value on the church and its spiritual integrity.

But the third thing that we learned from this is that in the church, in the body, was to be the presence of the Holy Spirit himself through the members of the body affording eyes that the work might be there. Oh, to recognize eyes. Dr. Tozer wrote in our books or in an article in *The Witness*, oh, maybe 10, 8 years ago.

They handed their prophet. It was an article extolling Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Have you read his book, *The Cost of Discipleship*? Well, I hope that there's about 100 of you that order it tomorrow by telephone and that Miss Wolford is just busy taking names and addresses.

Because that one chapter, *The Costly Grace*, is worth 10 times the price of the book. And it's done more to cause American pastors and people to think through some of the issues confronting us than probably any other. But they didn't recognize that God had put a voice into the Germany, the Nazi Germany.

They didn't know it. And we must recognize that the Spirit of God does not give all the gifts to any one person. But they're there in the body for the sake of the body.

But of course, this, apart from a proper relationship on the part of the people, this, you can't take one thing. This is why I feel so deeply that we're in error when we talk about the key. Well, there may be many keys, many parts.

Many things that need to go wrong. Recently, a vehicle I was driving stopped. And I had to have the car fixed.

Well, we thought it was the points. Put in new points, didn't start. Thought it was the condenser, the coil.

Put in new coil, didn't start. Thought it was a coil. Put in new coil, didn't start.

Finally, had to put in a fuel pump. And we got to the part that was wrong. Now, what's the key? The car can stop.

The part, it's the part that isn't working. And what's the key to koinonia? Where does the crisis in the assembly arise? It arises at the point where we've omitted some principle and failed in some truth and are ignorant of something God wants done. It behooves us, therefore, to come back and realize that this is not an impossible thing any more than an automobile is impossible.

Or a television set is impossible. There are repairmen that can fix these things. Now, I'm a perfect novice.

I feel like the Mohammedans. If a car stops, kick the tire. Or shove the fender.

Or slam the hood. If it doesn't start, I don't know what to do after that. See, that's the extent of my mechanical knowledge.

I just haven't gone any further than that. Out in Africa, they kill a chicken, sprinkle the blood on the radiator. And then if it doesn't start, they don't know what to do.

So this is about the extent of mine. But there are people that know what to do and know how to fix it. And brethren, I do believe with all my heart that the crisis in the church or in the fellowship now is that we have failed to understand the foundation of fellowship as we can and should.

And it's clear. The integrity that God places upon it, the importance that he puts upon the spiritual integrity in the fellowship and the gifts of the spirit that were given by him for the protection of the fellowship. But it's personal.

Let's come back to you. Close with this. How far have you come? What contribution do you make? I remember seeing in an office recently, are you part of the solution or are you part of the problem? And I have to keep asking my own heart this again and again.

Are we part of the solution or are we part of the problem? How far have you come in your relationship to the Lord? Your repentance complete? Conscience void of offense toward God? Have you understood something of your union with Christ in death? Have you come into the experience of the fullness of the Holy Spirit? Have you understood something of God's purpose in the body, in fellowship with others? You're somewhere along the line. So am I. But I believe your presence here on a Sunday night, certainly with nothing to pander to the flesh, just to come and consider the word, is proof and token that you want something better than you now have. And you want God to get something better out of your life than he's now getting.

And you want him to get something out of the church more than he presently has. Am I correct? Oh, wouldn't you love to see it again? Where great fear, that's awe, not just being afraid, but great awe came upon all the church and upon as many as heard these things. And no man durst join themselves to them.

And the people magnified them. Oh, to let the Lord Jesus get the glory. And here are principles, principles that apply to your life.

Somewhere you find yourself. Let's take a moment of prayer. Let's just do it this way tonight.

Let's think back to try and visualize the scene of which we've been speaking. Try and look at it from the eyes of history. And see this people, small in number, hated and despised, and yet loved of God, greatly loved of God.

Let's take a moment of meditation. How do you fit in? Do you believe the Lord Jesus is less power than he had then? Do you believe he has less love than he had then? Do you believe that he has less grace than he had then? It isn't just enough to say we're the problem. The question is, you don't want to be a problem, nor do I. Where are we problems? And where do our lives create roadblocks? How can our lives be adjusted so as to allow him to get from us the witness and testimony that he wants? Our father, we are tonight a thoughtful people.

The world stands in awe of our atom bombs and our nuclear weapons. Frightened of the fact that there are 30,000 megatons of nuclear explosive available. And our God, they've got to see that Jesus Christ is

alive from the dead.

Not just in individual instances of healing miracle. This we thank thee for. But father, our hearts who yearn tonight as we've read the word to be part of a people that love the Lord Jesus with all there is in them.

Just ordinary people like these of whom we've read. That are so related to thee and adjusted to thy will and way. That thou can trust thy glory with them in some measure beyond what we've seen.

And father, we don't know very much about this. Some things we see, but we need to be taught. We see some more principles we've added to those we considered in the morning.

We understand a little how important it is that there should be integrity in the body. Perhaps while we're waiting and closing father, there's someone to whom thou will speak that has had a name to live, but has not really had the witness of the Holy Ghost that they've been born again. And have not life.

What a mercy and how gracious it would be of thee father, if they would frankly and openly admit this and seek thee until thou has met them. Then father, there's possibly some that have heard about the crucified life and identification, but they've never entered into it experientially and appropriated this truth. Perhaps there are others, Lord of us that do not know the fullness of thy spirit in quickening and empowering the resurrection life of Christ revealed, released in us.

We're here, Lord. We must wait on thee. Preaching isn't enough.

Teaching isn't enough. Outlines that are mimeographed good as they may be aren't enough. Somehow we've got to have a visitation from thee that just lays hold of our hearts till all the other interests seem to lose their hold and grip upon our imagination.

And the fact that the risen Christ is looking for a people to whom he can reveal himself and through whom he could show how glorious he is, that all may come upon those outside, that they may know that truly God is in the midst of his own and that thou canst add to the church daily such as should be being saved. Lord, give to us tonight a passionate longing to be part of something that's of heaven. It didn't spring up from earth, didn't begin in program.

It came down from heaven. And give it to us, Lord, tonight desire to be part with thee in something that's holy from thyself. And so teach us, lead us, take us by the hand.

We're children, Lord. We've not been this way before. But we want our lives to count for eternity.

Father, in one blow we could be liquidated, just vaporized here as we live in this city. Target one for any enemy action. We don't want, Lord, to have just survived and have robbed the Lord Jesus of an opportunity to show how wonderful he is.

This is what we long for. And so lead us out of ourselves and our previous attitudes and into a release in thy will and purpose. Until, Lord, students meeting in their rooms, friends meeting in their homes, young people meeting in their residences, wherever they are.

There's just a going in after thee and a meeting thee. Spontaneous, fitting our local needs, but an opportunity for us to share together the risen life of Christ. We ask this believing Father that if there are those here that have been spoken to by thy Spirit, they'll count it wisdom to make known their need and deal with it tonight.

And before we close with the benediction, if you have a spiritual need, do not leave until you've dealt with it. I wonder if there are those tonight that would say by a raised hand, yes, I do have need, must be dealt with before I can have part in what God is doing. If you'd care to raise your hand, we'd be so happy to remember you in prayer.

Then let us stand, you stay and make known your need if you will. Let us stand for the benediction. Now unto him who is able to do exceeding abundantly above all we can ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end.

Amen.

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