

Christ's Plan for the Church - Part 3

by William MacDonald

William MacDonald discusses the role of believers as priests in the church and critiques the clerical system's impact on spiritual growth and evangelism.

Duration: 44:11

Scripture: 1 Peter 2:1

Topics: "Church"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses the challenges and temptations faced by preachers in today's world. He emphasizes the importance of staying true to the message of the gospel and not compromising spiritual standards in order to attract more people. The speaker also highlights the need for a life of faith, just like the men in the New Testament who believed that God would take care of them. He encourages believers to serve as unto the Lord, as bond slaves who belong to their master and serve out of love, rather than working for a salary. The speaker concludes by stating that the responsibility for spreading the Christian movement should not solely rest on ministers, missionaries, and evangelists, but should be shared by the laity as well.

Transcript

Please turn in your Bibles to 1 Peter chapter 2, 1 Peter chapter 2, and we'll read the first nine verses. Therefore laying aside all malice, all guile, hypocrisy, envy, and evil speaking, as newborn babes desire this pure milk of the word that you may grow thereby, if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is gracious. Coming to him as to a living stone, rejected indeed by men, but chosen by God and precious.

You also as living stones are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. Therefore it is also contained in the scripture, Behold I lay in Zion a chief cornerstone, elect, precious, and he who believes on him will by no means be put to shame. Therefore to you who believe he is precious, but to those who are disobedient, the stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone, and a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense.

They stumble being disobedient to the word to which they also were appointed. But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, his own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of him who calls you out of darkness into his marvelous light. In the last session we talked about Christ being the head of the church, and our obligation to recognize him as the head, and seek his guidance in the control and administration of the assembly.

We also mentioned that all believers are members of the body of Christ, and this taught us to recognize all true believers as our brothers and sisters in Christ, even if we might not agree with them on everything. But we can draw a tight circle around ourselves as far as the principles of the word of God is concerned, and then a wide circle as far as affection for God's people are concerned. And then we also spoke of every believer being gifted, every believer has some gift.

Now we want to see that all believers are priests, and that's why I read this portion of the word of God. All believers today are priests to God. Women are priests, men are priests, all believers are priests.

They're holy priests, verse 5. You also, as living stones, are built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices. And then they're royal priests, verse 9, that we would go forth and show the excellencies of him who called us out of darkness into his marvelous light. In the Old Testament, in order to be a priest, you had to be of the tribe of Levi, and of the family of Aaron, and of course you had to be male as well.

And the purpose of the priests in the Old Testament was to offer up physical, material sacrifices to God. Sometimes it was a sacrificial animal that was offered to God, sometimes it was a grain offering that was offered to God. It was largely a system of rituals.

The priest was really a ceremonial drudge, and he went through endless ceremonies that, as you know, did not succeed in putting away a single sin. It made atonement for the sin. The priest made atonement for the altar.

The priest made atonement for the vessels that were used in the temple. They never sinned. No, it's just a ceremony that set those things apart as ritually clean for the service of the Lord.

But as we say, all the blood of beasts on Jewish altars slain never put away one sin or cleansed the guilty stain. The sacrifices of the priests in the New Testament are quite different. Spiritual sacrifices.

What are some of these spiritual sacrifices that we can all offer to God? Well, first of all, of course, is the sacrifice of our bodies. Romans chapter 12, verses 1 and 2. I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. Be not conformed to the world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

This is the highest form of worship that anyone can offer. That is to get down on his or her knees and turn over his body, and in doing that, of course, he's turning over himself to the Lord for whatever the Lord might want him to do. It's the most reasonable, rational, sensible thing a person can do.

If the Lord Jesus Christ is God, and he died for us on the cross of shame, the least we can do is turn over our bodies to him to use as he wishes to use. But it's a big stumbling block in the lives of Christians. You remember C.T. Studd said, If Jesus Christ be God and died for me, then no sacrifice can be too great for me to make for him.

And he also said that he had always realized that Christ had died for him to purchase him, and if he took his body and used it for what he wanted to use, that he was a thief, because he was taking something that didn't belong to him. And he said, When I saw that, it didn't seem too difficult to turn my life over to the Lord. That's the first sacrifice we can offer to the Lord.

The second is the sacrifice of our praise. Hebrews chapter 13. I might just turn to that, because it's not the only one that's there.

Hebrews 13, 15. Therefore by him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God. Actually, when we praise the Lord, when we worship him, we're really fulfilling the purpose of our existence here on earth.

The Westminster Catechism was right when it said, The chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy him forever. And praise is the due outpouring of our lives in gratitude for what the Lord has done for us. Then good works are another sacrifice.

It says, verse 16, but do not forget to do good and to share. So with such sacrifices, God is well pleased. Do good.

Good works. And you know, anything that a Christian does, when we think of good works, we think, well, getting up and preaching, you know, or going out soul winning, or some spiritual work like that. Actually, anything that a Christian does in obedience to the word of God, with a view of glorifying the Lord, of helping other people, is a good work.

When you go to your office, to your work, and you're doing it to glorify God, that's a good work. God counts that as a good work. It's not spiritual.

Yes, it is spiritual. God doesn't make that distinction between the spiritual and the secular that we make. So you have your bodies, your body, praise, your good works, your possessions.

Hebrews 13, 16. Yes, but do not forget to do good and to share. With such sacrifices, God is well pleased.

The wonderful experience of becoming a hilarious giver to the Lord and to the work of God. To share. To know the joy of shuffling it out for God and watching him shovel it in to you and realizing that his shovel is bigger than yours.

And then our prayers are spoken of in Psalm 141 as a sacrifice to God. Psalm 141. It's a beautiful verse.

I think it's worth turning to, isn't it? Psalm 141 verse 2 says, Let my prayer be set before you as incense, the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice. I think that's beautiful. Isn't it amazing that there are things we can do on earth that affect things in heaven? That a Christian can pray and it fills the area around the throne of God with fragrant incense.

I think that's great. And I believe it. I'm just a simple believer.

Let my prayer be set before you as incense, the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice. And then, of course, our service for the Lord, too, is one of the sacrifices that we can offer to him. Paul uses it that way in Romans chapter 15.

Romans chapter 15 and verse 16. He says, That I might be a minister of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles, ministering the gospel of God, that the offering, here it is, the offering of the Gentiles might be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit. What a wonderful, exalted view of Christian ministry that is, coming and offering, for instance, the Gentiles up to God as a sacrifice.

And, of course, Paul was called to be the apostle to the Gentiles. And I said that women were priests as well as men. And that's true.

A woman can offer these sacrifices to the Lord. I just want to add this. While all believers are priests, there are controls placed on priesthood in the New Testament.

It would be easy to point this out. For instance, if you were to turn to 1 Corinthians chapter 14, there are at least seven controls placed upon people who would like to get up and speak in tongues in the early days of the church. Seven controls.

You say, what are they? Well, the first control is do not forbid to speak in tongues. The second is, if a man speaks in tongues, there must be an interpreter. The next is, not more than three may speak in tongues in any one meeting.

Next is, what they say must be edifying. Next, the women must remain silent. And the last, everything must be done decently in order.

This is in the meeting of the church. Incidentally, if those controls were followed strictly, there probably would be no tongues movement today. But there are controls of the Holy Spirit.

Paul never speaks against tongues in the Word of God, but he speaks about the abuse of tongues. And because of the terrible abuse he lists by the Spirit of God, these controls on the use of tongues. There are others.

In 1 Timothy chapter 2, you have controls on a person's priesthood. 1 Timothy chapter 2. And it goes for men as well as for women. 1 Timothy chapter 2. It says, I therefore exhort, first of all, that supplications, prayers, intercession, and giving of thanks be made for all men.

And just let me skip down here. Verse 8. Therefore I desire that the men, and the word there is males, the males, and speaking about public meetings of the assembly, that the males pray everywhere. Here's a control.

Lifting up holy hands without wrath and doubting. In other words, when a man gets up and leads the congregation in prayer, his life is important. His life is important.

There should be a life of holiness that's offering those prayers to the Lord. Lifting up holy hands without wrath or doubting. And then the role of women is told.

Let a woman learn in silence with all submission. I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man but to be in silence. For Adam was formed first, then Eve.

Adam was not deceived but the woman being deceived fell into transgression. Nevertheless, she will be saved in childbearing if they continue in faith, love, and holiness, and self-control. So while it is true that men and women are all priests, it's also true that the Spirit of God places controls on the public exercise of that priesthood.

There should be no problem there because God has assigned different roles. What role does he assign to women? Many, many different ones. But I think the last verse, raising a godly seed, nevertheless she shall be saved in childbearing, has nothing to do with the salvation of her soul.

It's the salvation of her position in the church. The preceding verses might have created the impression in your mind that a woman is reduced to a non-entity. Not true at all.

Paul says she's saved in childbearing. In raising children for God, and it's interesting, the first verse of the next chapter says if anyone desires the position of an elder, he desires a good work. And there's no chapter break, of course, in the original.

So, if you want my candid opinion, I think the woman has the highest of all ministries. The highest of all ministries. We think of platform work as being the highest.

I don't think so. I think God knows something higher than that. I think of a woman like Susanna Wesley who raised 19 children for the glory of God.

John Wesley, who saved England by his ministry from the ravages of the Revolution. And Charles Wesley, to whom we're so indebted for the hymns that he wrote. Can it be that I should gain an interest in the Saviour's blood? Wonderful, you know.

Be worth living a lifetime just to write one hymn like that. Susanna Wesley was in back of that. And I really say that sincerely, that I really believe the greatest ministry that God has given to man or woman is the ministry of the woman producing a glorious, holy seed for God.

Maybe somebody would like to talk privately after that. I'd be glad to do so. Now I just want to switch over to a subject that we touched before.

And that is the clerical system. And this is probably difficult for people today because for hundreds of years the church has known the clerical system. We have one man leading a congregation.

Let me say at the very outset, it's unknown as far as the New Testament is concerned. It didn't occur in the early days of the church. It didn't occur until the second or third generation in the history of the church.

And it has been with us ever since. When Paul wrote to the Philippian believers, you remember, he said to the saints with their elders and deacons. We went over that in a previous message.

To the saints with their elders and deacons. He didn't say to the pastor. He didn't say to the minister.

He didn't say to the cleric in charge. Paul was a gentleman. If there had been such a person, he would have sent greetings to him as well.

You can depend on that. The reason he didn't mention such a person is because such a person didn't exist. In the King James Version of the Bible, in the old King James Oxford Bible, at the end of 1 Timothy and 2 Timothy, there was a little footnote that said Timothy was the first bishop of the church in Ephesus.

Completely without warrant, unfortunately. In the Bible you don't have that footnote, I'm sure. Unless you have the King James.

And Titus also, first bishop of the church in Crete. Entirely without warrant. These men were itinerant men.

These men were troubleshooters for the apostle Paul. He didn't stay in one place. The longest Paul stayed in one place in his ministry was two years in Ephesus.

He spent a total of three years in Ephesus, all told. But at one time, the longest he stayed was two years. He was a man on the move.

So the clerical system is really foreign to the New Testament. Not only so, it's hated by God. Turn to the book of Revelation, please.

Chapter 2. Revelation chapter 2. And here you have mention of the Nicolaitans. The Nicolaitans. Chapter 2, verse 6. But this you have, that you hate the deeds of Nicolaitans, which I also hate.

The word really means victory over the laity. That's what it means, victory over the laity. Down through the centuries, a group of men have taken this position of dominating the laity.

And God doesn't like it. Verse 15 of that same chapter. Thus also you have those who hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate.

It's interesting when the word of God says that he hates us twice in the same chapter. Why does he hate it? Well, first of all, it ignores the purpose for which the gifts were given to the church. Remember, in our last session, we learned that the gifts were given for the purpose of the saints under the work of the ministry.

The work of the ministry belongs to the saints, to every child of God, every believer in the Lord Jesus Christ. Again, there's a danger that people would gather to a man rather than to the Lord Jesus Christ in this clerical system. And people speak with affection and almost adoration of their minister, of their preacher.

You know, God doesn't like to share his glory with another in that way. And oftentimes he stains the pride of human glory when men take that position to themselves with pride. The Lord Jesus Christ is the gathering center of his people.

And I think that's a great truth. If you get an assembly of God's people who realize that they gather to Christ, it gives stability to an assembly that nothing else will do. People will go there because they believe Christ is there.

Did he not say, where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst. You know, that's hard for people to take in. There am I in the midst.

Just be a simple believer and appropriate it by faith that when you gather with Christian people to worship the Lord Jesus Christ, he's there. Well, you say, he's everywhere. Well, that's true, he's everywhere.

But he's there in a special way when you're gathered in his name. There was a couple, a farm couple, that used to gather at a little church. And they could look out the window and they could see their farmhouse and the barn right there, not far away.

And one day they were sitting there and the husband's head was bowed and worshipped to the Lord. The wife took a quick look out the window and she saw the barn on fire. She leaned over and she said to her husband, dear, the barn is on fire.

And he said, hush, the Lord is in this place. You know, if we really believed that, it would make a tremendous difference in our meetings, wouldn't it? He really believed the word of God. He accepted that by faith, that the Lord was there in a special way.

And what good would a garden hose do anyway? That's a tremendous motivation for regularity at the meetings of the assembly. There's a danger when all the teaching is done by one man. There's no system

of checks and balances.

I heard directly of a minister in a church and he's all excited about this new millennium starting. And he's teaching his church to get food together and make provision for this time because the whole world was going to fall apart. And the next thing you know, he had a split in his church over cellars filled with food.

Well, it's too bad that there weren't other brothers there that could sit with him and reason with him from the word of God and encourage him to have faith in God. God hasn't forsaken his people yet. And no man has the ability to provide the diversity of teaching that the Holy Spirit can do through a group of men.

I think that's very important. My earliest memories are of conversational Bible readings when the saints would be studying their Bibles and they'd come together and start through the book of Isaiah. And they would be sharing insights that they had received from the Lord.

Really, there's nothing quite equal with that, with the liberty to speak and to share those things. The clerical system stifles the development of gift in the church. I say this to young fellows and young girls in our meeting.

You have an opportunity in an assembly such as the one with which you're connected to exercise your gift that you wouldn't have in many of the average churches. Think of that. You could just be a bump on a log in many churches today.

Just fulfill your responsibilities there and go on your way. And the clerical system hinders world evangelism. I think I'll quote from a man named James Stewart.

He said, the world will never be evangelized the way God intended it to be as long as there's a clerical system. That's very, very true. Now, I'm going to just take a moment, more than a moment, to quote to you from some men.

You say, MacDonald, you're pretty hard on the clerical system. I can hear some of you saying that. Let me tell you what some clerics say about it.

Are we wrong in the position that we take? Alexander McLaren, some of you might have his commentary. He was a cleric. He said, I cannot but believe that the present practice of confining the public teaching of the church to an official class has done harm.

Why should one man be ever speaking in hundreds of people who are able to teach sitting dumb to listen or pretend to listen to him? J.I. Packard. Some of you have read his book, Knowing God. He says, by clericalism I mean that combination of conspiracy and tyranny in which the minister claims and the congregation agrees that all spiritual ministry is his responsibility and not theirs.

A notion that is both disreputable in principle and spirit-quickening in practice. I didn't write that. J.I. Packard wrote that.

John Stott. You know John Stott, many of you. Anglican cleric.

What model of the church then should we keep in our minds? The traditional model is that of the pyramid. In which the pastor is perched precariously on the pinnacle, like a little pope in his own church, while the laity are arrayed below him in serried ranks of inferiority. It's a totally unbiblical image because the New Testament envisages not a single pastor with a docile flock, but both a plural oversight and an

every-member ministry.

Are you shocked to hear that from John Stott? He's the one who wrote that. Not somebody in what we think of as little, simple New Testament assemblies. Donald Ray Barnhouse, probably the greatest Bible teacher I've ever heard.

Myself, 10th Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia. Layton Ford, brother-in-law of Billy Graham. He says our whole vocabulary of church activity will change if we really begin to take seriously the New Testament pattern.

As Richard Halverson has said, when we ask, how many ministers do your church have, the traditional answer is one or two or five, depending on how large the paid staff is. But the true answer is 200 or 2,000, depending on how large the membership is. Every believer is a minister.

You'd think that was written by folks like within your assembly. It wasn't written by that. It was written by Layton Ford.

He says the church which bottlenecks its outreach by depending on its specialists, its pastors or evangelists, to do its witnessing is living in violation of both the intention of its head and the consistent pattern of the early Christians. E. Stanley Jones was a Methodist missionary in India for many years, and he was very outspoken on this subject. He said the church at Antioch was founded by laymen, carried on by laymen, and spread through the world by laymen.

That is important for the reconstruction of the church of today. The next great spiritual awakening is going to come through the laity. Hitherto the center of gravity has been on the minister.

Now the center of gravity has shifted to the laity. We ministers, missionaries and evangelists are never going to win the world. We're too few to do it, and if we could do it, it wouldn't be good, for it would take away from the laity that spiritual growth and development which comes through sharing one's faith.

But we will never get the laity to take the responsibility for the Christian movement and its spread by saying, come on and help the pastor. Their inner response and sometimes outer response is, why should we? That's his job. We pay him for that.

He says the very setup of the ordinary church tends to produce the anonymous. That's kind of clever. The average church tends to produce the anonymous.

The congregation is supposed to be silent and receptive, and the pastor is supposed to be outgoing and aggressive. That produces by its very makeup the spectator and the participant. By its very makeup it produces the recessive, the ingrown, the non-contributive, and the parasite.

Men and women who during the week are molders of opinion, directors of large concerns, directors of destinies, are expected to be putty on Sunday and are supposed to like it. They have little responsibility, hence make little response, except perhaps, I enjoyed your sermon. They have little to do, hence they do little.

He says the laity on the whole have been in the stands as spectators, and the clergy have been in the field playing the game. If the clergyman kicks a goal or makes a touchdown, he's applauded. Good pastor, hope he will stay.

That setup must be changed. The laity must come out of the stands as spectators and take the field as players, and the clergyman must come off the field as players and take the sidelines as coaches of the team. The clergyman must be guides, stimulators, and spiritualizers of an essentially lay movement, downgrading them.

No, upgrading them, for it's better to be a coach than to be a player. Better to get ten people to work than to do ten men's work. You'll notice that many of these men use the word clergy and laity.

Of course, those words aren't found in the New Testament, but I think you know what they mean. Brian Green says the future of Christianity and the evangelization of the world rest in the hands of ordinary men and women, and not primarily in those of professional Christian ministers. Harnack claims that when the church won its greatest victories in the early days of the Roman Empire, it did so not by preachers or teachers or apostles, but by informal missionaries.

True. And this is J.A. Stuart's quote. Looking back to the apostolic age, he said each member of the local assembly went out to win souls for Christ by personal contact, and then brought these newborn babes into these local churches where they were indoctrinated and strengthened in the faith of the Redeemer.

They, in turn, went out to do likewise. In another place, he said boldly that the world will never be evangelized the way God intended as long as we have a clerical system. Now, I haven't quoted anything from men from small New Testament assemblies as we would think of them.

All of these were men who were largely in the clerical system themselves, and they say this is not the way to go. At a time when many evangelical Christians are moving away from the clerical system, many assemblies with only a plurality of elders and deacons are moving toward clerising. Isn't that funny? They hire one man to perform their religious functions for them.

They're buying high and selling low. Their cry is, give us a minister like the other churches. They're like those in the social sciences who adopt popular trends of thought at the time that secular professionals are beginning to subject the trends to serious criticism.

It's a matter of climbing on the bandwagon just about the time it's slowing down. Well, let me just say something. You say, what about some of these godly men that we hear on the radio preaching the word of God? Well, I thank God for them.

It's not that. I turn on the radio, I hear John MacArthur, I hear Vernon McGee, I hear these men. It just rejoices my heart to hear the word going out like that.

I think there's something better. I think there's something better. God's way is the best way.

That is a simple New Testament assembly with a plurality of elders, with deacons, and with every member evangelism. Where the saints go out and in the context of their daily work, they witness for the Lord, they see people saved, and they see them brought into the feeding station. Where they can grow and nurture and serve the Lord.

Connected with the one-man ministry, there's always the problem of a salaried ministry. If you go to the average seminary, you can take a course in pastoral psychology or pastoral theology, perhaps. You can learn how to draw up your contract when you go to a church, and what your salary is going to be.

What's not included, anything you make from weddings or funerals is in addition to that. Your house will be provided, and a car will be provided, or gasoline for the use of your car. You can learn all that in a seminary.

But you know, the whole idea of a salaried ministry is foreign to the word of God. Why? Because those who pay the salary can oftentimes control the message. When we were at Mayesh years ago, there was a big denominational church across the street from us.

And the pastor said to us one day, he said, I could preach the gospel the way you men preach it. But he said, my people wouldn't take it. They wouldn't take it.

And he subsequently left and became a public relations man for General Motors, which was good, good stuff. Those who pay the salary often require evidence that something is happening. For instance, in many cases, the one man minister has to give a count, maybe to the church board or to the denomination.

What has happened during the year? How many people have come by transfer? How many people have come to the church by baptism and so forth? Well, maybe the man has preached all year and nothing has happened. He can't control the number of people that are saved. But there's always the danger of lowering the message in order to reduce the numbers, isn't there? There's always the danger of watering down the message of the gospel in order to lower spiritual standards.

And of course, there's always the subtle temptation to avoid subjects that the people might not like. You say, well, what was it like in the New Testament? Well, it was a life of faith. These men in the New Testament went out and they believed if God called them, God would take care of them.

Have they never worried about finances? Paul, writing from prison in Philippi, says, I have all things that abound. He had received the gift which had been sent to them by Epaphroditus. That's wonderful, you know.

It would be hard for people to realize today that an assembly like yours can commend a man to the work of the Lord, or a woman, let's say, to the mission field. And sure of the call of God, that person can go out and know that his needs are going to be provided for. It's God's way.

Hudson Taylor said, God always pays for what he orders. It's absolutely true. You have to be sure of the call of God.

But if you're sure of that, you never have to worry about it. For over 50 years, I've looked to the Lord for the supply of my needs. I've never worried a single moment about where the money, I didn't know, still don't know where the money will come from in the next two weeks.

But I know God, and I know he will provide. He's never failed me yet. And I've had more opportunity to invest in the work of the Lord, as a full-time servant of the Lord, than I ever did as an investment analyst in the First National Bank of Boston.

I tell you, God's way is the best way. And, you know, it's always the temptation of a minister on a fixed salary, hearing a call of God to go to a bigger church with a bigger salary. You know, it's a temptation.

I mean, we're all human. And it's just a very valid temptation that he must face. You know, according to Deuteronomy 15, 18, a bond servant is worth twice as much as a hired servant.

This is an interesting verse, you might turn to it. Deuteronomy 15, 18, says, It shall not seem hard to you when you send him away, that's the servant, when you send him away free from you, for he has been worth a double hired servant in serving you six years. Then the Lord your God will bless you in all that you do.

Here's the law concerning a bond servant, a bond slave. The difference between a bond slave and a hired servant is the bond slave belongs to the master. The hired servant works for pay.

And this verse suggests to you and to me that a bond slave, one who belongs to his master and who loves his master and serves his master out of love, he's worth twice what a hired servant ever is. And it's true today in the century in which we live. Those who serve as unto the Lord are twice as valuable, can accomplish twice as much as those who work for a salaried income.

Now I'd like to remind our hearts as we come to the close of another session, that just following the New Testament pattern as it's found in the pages of the New Testament, it's not enough. We might comfort ourselves with the fact that we remember the Lord every week. I think it's good.

We might comfort ourselves with the fact that we believe in baptism by immersion. I think that's good, too. I agree with that.

We can just go down the list and be very orthodox and all of these things, but I like to emphasize over and over again, it's good, but it's not enough. We have to have New Testament power. We have to be walking in the Spirit.

We have to be filled with the Spirit of God if we're going to be the best for him. What do you mean, filled with the Spirit of God? Well, I mean available to the Lord to use us in any way he wants. Filled with the Word of God.

You can't be filled with the Spirit of God unless you're filled with the Word of God. Men and women of prayer. Men and women who live sacrificially for the spread of the gospel.

This is where it really counts for the Lord, and I think this is what we need to constantly remind ourselves. God is not a ritualist. God isn't just satisfied that you do 60 cartwheels in penance for sin.

It doesn't mean anything to God. God is concerned with the inner person. God is concerned with the heart.

He wants us to follow the New Testament path. I think it's very, very important, but I still say that what the world is looking for is power. There are those today who say that there's no use just preaching the gospel.

You have to preach the gospel. You have to see it accompanied by miracles. But when they say miracles, they mean raising the dead, healing the sick, giving sight to the blind, and then... I say, well, there's a measure of truth in what they say.

The world wants to see the miracle of a transformed life. And I tell you, when you get an assembly of people whose lives are transformed by the grace of God, I'm going to tell you there's an impact in the community when that takes place. I continue to pray for many of these men who are in the clerical system that we've been talking about today.

I love them. I love them in the Lord. I really do.

But I think there's something better than that, just the simplicity. Gathering to the Lord himself, where every person is a Bible student. Every person is witnessing for the Lord Jesus.

Every person is obeying the word of God for himself. Shall we pray? Father, we just thank you for your word. We think of how the church has drifted down through the centuries.

All kinds of accretions have been made. And so much so that people can't imagine that it would be any other way. We pray that as we come to the word of God, we might be sensitive to hear your voice speaking to us.

And as we see these things in the word of God, we pray that we might be faithful to them. We ask it in the Savior's name. Amen.

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