

Church is Not Optional: Part 2

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[0 : 00] That's a good prayer. Lord, prepare me to be a sanctuary. But the truth of the matter is you already are. We don't think about it, but you are the temple of the living God.

The Spirit of God lives in each one of us and collectively together. We are the sanctuary. We are the new temple with Jesus being the cornerstone of it.

He is present right here, right now. And when all these stones come together, it's special. You're a little temple on your own.

Amen to that. But when the temple comes together, wow, wow. We should expect an explosion of God's presence in a profound way.

So when we say prepare me, I hope you're preparing before you get here. That you're praying, asking God to meet his people and to be with us in the fellowship.

[1 : 06] But it's okay to pray that right now too. Nothing wrong with that. Speak to us, O Lord. Father, as we come to your word now, we recognize we are sanctuaries and we ask, O Lord, that you would speak to us and that you would speak through me as your word is preached.

We don't need to hear my opinions. We need to hear the word of God. Every Sunday, we must open the book because in the book, you speak clearly, profoundly, with great depth and precision, you speak, give us ears to hear.

Give me grace to preach this book as a dying man. So Father, come, fill this sanctuary afresh that we may hear from the living Christ, our only hope and joy.

remember those families who are grieving, loss of the injuries, this past evening, past night, shootings in our city.

O Lord, have mercy upon those families and of those who have lost their life, Lord, have mercy, or especially have mercy upon those families. Send your comforting grace through those who know you, send grace to these people, these dear people who are hurting.

[2 : 39] May Jesus, may they see Jesus in their need of him and that his arms are open wide to comfort and care and transform.

Speak your word now, Lord. Feed your sheep. Glorify your son. Save someone. In Jesus' name, amen.

Amen. Acts 2, 42 to 47, once again. And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship to the breaking of bread and the prayers.

And awe came upon every soul and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all as any had need.

And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor of all the people.

[3 : 47] And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved. That is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. You may be seated. Thank you. Thank you.

Praise team once again for leading us beautiful music. On the church calendar today is Pentecost Sunday.

The birthday of the New Covenant Church actually. Because remember, Pentecost came 40 days after Passover. Pentecost Sunday.

It is fitting then that we are studying what happened on that first Pentecost after Jesus ascended into his glory. the Spirit of God came with great power upon those who followed Jesus before his death and ascension.

And then on that same day through those disciples the Spirit of God fell powerfully on a large group of people. And there you see the birth of the New Covenant Church.

[4 : 59] It would become an entity that would not just be for those Jewish people in Jerusalem but it would be it would spread throughout the earth. People from every tribe, language, nation, and tongue would begin with experience the power and the presence of the kingdom of God revealed in the glorious gospel of Jesus.

And we are they. We are those. This is the beginning of our life here in this wonderful passage. And one of the most important lessons that Jesus teaches those who come into his kingdom, who come under his lordship, who believe his good news, the good news that you can't save yourself but Jesus has come to save you.

Who believe it. He gives, he teaches a very important lesson in our passage this morning, part two from last week. He teaches us to share.

That's crazy. Because you're thinking what I'm thinking. I know you're thinking it. I know how to share. That's one of the first things we teach our children, isn't it?

When they get a little bit older, when they can move around and grab things and take things, what do we teach them to do? Especially if they have siblings, we teach them to share.

[6 : 30] And if they're the only child, if they're the only child, they begin to learn it when they get to school, don't they? First grade, you better, kindergarten, forget that, you learn to share.

Thank you, Stephanie. Now at first, some kids cry when they're being told to share. But generally, we get over it.

You know, not sharing. We usually get over it. And we start sharing, but then it gets hard again. You ever notice that? As little kids really begin to share, they start having fun with each other, start playing together, they start sharing their toys a little bit.

But then all of a sudden, as they get a little bit older, they go backwards. And sharing becomes more difficult.

And then we become adults. And sharing sometimes can be very difficult. Why? What happened?

[7 : 33] We start identifying what's valuable. You see, it's easy to share stuff you don't care about. But as we get older, we begin to realize, I like that.

That's important. That costs money. I can't get that easily. And all of a sudden, it gets harder and harder to share it.

And then we start identifying whose trust we're of you to share with. Yes. Yes. Yes. Yes. Yes. Yes. Yes. Yes. Yes. Yes. Yes. Yes. Yes. Yes. I had a kid. I got to tell you this. This is funny.

One of my best friends growing up was a black kid named Conrad. I say that he's black only because he's the only black Conrad I've ever met. Not a common name in West Philly.

Okay. Conrad. I hope he's not listening. I love you, man. Haven't seen him in 30 years. But Conrad was a little bit of a klutz. And so I remember I went to the zoo and my mom and dad took me to the zoo, Philadelphia Zoo.

[8 : 42] It was a really neat place. And I came back with a little pop gun. I don't know if you've been to those. I don't know if you had them here in Chattanooga. But we had these little pop guns. You cock it and it had a little cork in the tip. And you foop and the cork would shoot out.

But it was on a string so it wouldn't go very far. I took the string off. So I'm going around the house. Boop. Oops. Sorry, mom. You know, I'm shooting up.

And so Conrad came over one day. And I mean, I love that gun. I mean, it was so much fun. And Conrad came and he said, Kev, can I hold you? Can I try? I said, no.

I said, he said, you're going to break it. And my mama, my Georgia peach mama with her heart as big as this room, boy, let Conrad play with the gun.

Prop gun, guys. Pop gun. And I said, no, mom, he's going to break it. And she made me, mama word, she made me give my gun to him.

[9 : 46] And he cocked it. Smacked. Broke it in half. Who was it? The Incredible Hulk or something? I don't know. But, and I looked at my mother. And all she could do, oh man, she felt this, she just shook her head.

Boy, you said he was going to break it. Don't. It's, he wasn't trustworthy. And it's hard to share. You see, we don't mind sharing if it's safe and pain free.

But Christian sharing can be costly. Christian sharing, biblical sharing is risky. However, sharing in the power of the spirit of the kingdom of God is powerful.

It's healing. It's loving. It's a strong testimony to the reality of Jesus. So that's why we need to pray for the spirit of God to once again fill us so that we are a fellowship of sharing.

That's what we began looking at what it means for the spirit to move on us to be, remember, devoted to the fellowship. Devoted to the fellowship. To, in other words, to persevere in our commitment.

[11 : 14] Even, remember the word, addicted to the fellowship. fellowship. And we saw that the fellowship is going to be a place of conflict of some sort.

It's not easy putting sinners together in one place. And just in case the enemy is at work and try to twist my words from last week, this does not mean that we welcome fellowship.

That we welcome, that we try to create conflict. That we just say, oh, it's just going to happen. Now, that's not what I said or that's not what the Bible means. When it shows us this, we are to seek to be a sharing community so that we reduce conflict and we are a loving community and a forgiving community so that we reduce conflict among us.

We are to seek unity and the peace and the purity of the church. It's actually in your membership vows that you will pursue the peace and the purity of the church.

Why? Because we are the fellowship. And we are to be devoted to it. But sinners will always find disunity and conflict at some point.

[12 : 31] What makes us Christian and followers of Jesus is how we deal with the conflict in our fellowship. We prayerfully and we humbly, we talk it out.

Matthew 18. We don't counsel each other. Well, should we just leave either? The world does that. That's how the world handles conflict and doesn't honor Christ.

If we don't talk, we will not reconcile. Can I say it again? If we do not talk to each other, we cannot reconcile.

That's why Jesus gave us Matthew 18. So we will come to each other. This is true fellowship. It's the place where iron sharpens iron.

And that means there will be heat and there will be sparks. But there will also be improvement, sharpening. Oh, look how Jesus works.

[13 : 34] He works even in the midst of something like conflict. He works to sharpen his people. If we'll trust him. But this morning, let's look at the specifics of fellowship that Jesus gives.

Moving to the specifics. I want to see how far we get this morning. True fellowship involves a few things. It involves our space, our stuff, our life, our suffering, and our commitment.

Let's start with the first. True fellowship involves togetherness. It involves our space. Notice what verse 44 says to us.

And they all believed and were together. I'm going to stop right there. Because you go right by that and you miss what he's saying. Because why would he say the obvious?

Of course they were together. He's making a point. He has to be making a point about it. They all believed. First of all, let's talk about presence.

[14 : 43] They were together. They were experiencing and touching one another, which is part of the essence of fellowship. But it's all being together, being able to lay hands on each other and talk and to hug.

You know how much, think about how much we missed it, right? When we couldn't come to worship. How many of you wept when you came to worship for the first time after being away for a while, you were, some of you were weeping.

And when you were hugged by somebody, how, across this country, people have testified about being touched. Feeling someone's arms around you, shaking someone's hand.

You can never forget that fellowship involves together. It involves space. It's simple but profound. But hold it now. Just because you come to church does not mean you are fully in fellowship. To be together here also means purpose.

[15 : 57] Presence first. Purpose. They were one mind and one purpose. What was that one mind and purpose?

Well, it's obvious, isn't it? It seems to have been what Jesus told him in chapter one. It was the kingdom of God as revealed in Christ, knowing Jesus, making Jesus known together.

Experiencing Jesus together. All who believed were together. They were of one mind seeking him. He was everything to them.

And their mutual faith in him united them in mind, in purpose. He was the, and they came from, remember, remember the Rome, remember what was happening here. The day of Pentecost.

They came from all over the Roman Empire. They had their own dialects. They all spoke the common tongue, which is Koine Greek, which is New Testament is written in that language. But they all spoke, but they came with various tongues.

[16:57] That's why when they got up to preach, the Bible says they heard them in their own dialects. The miracle that God gave these Jews to speak in a way that all those folk from all their heart, their heart language, as it were, they heard them in their heart language, though these Jews weren't even speaking it.

Miracle. Miracle. And here they come. Listen, they came with their various, they were Jews, but each place they came from had his own twist of culture.

So here they are. They're sort of starting to represent what's going to happen worldwide. They're all coming together with their various backgrounds and ideas and issues in their own little cities and places, and yet they were of one mind.

They weren't robots, but they were of one mind. They were the mind of Christ, the kingdom of Christ, following Jesus no matter what, knowing this Jesus.

What a model for us. I guarantee you, they all didn't vote for Caesar. Caesar. Caesar. Caesar.

[18:22] Caesar. Caesar. Caesar. Caesar. Caesar. Caesar. Caesar. Caesar. Caesar. I guarantee you, they all had different political ideas. Some of them liked the guys who led their country, their little town, and some didn't.

Remember, we already saw that there's going to be a culture clash later on when about the Jewish and about the widows being fed. Some widows were fed, some widows weren't fed, but they were different cultures. See, there's always, they came, but they were of one mind.

They were together, one mind. And it kept them together because they were focused on the kingdom and Jesus was everything. We can learn from them.

They grew to know more, know more about Christ in the true fellowship because true Christian fellowship, write this down, is vertical and horizontal. I'm still talking about being together now.

Let me, 1 John. I think we got that. 1 John 1, 3. That which we have seen and heard, we proclaim also to you so that you may have fellowship with us and indeed, our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ.

[19:37] Here's the Apostle John and he's saying, listen, he wanted to have fellowship with his brothers and sisters in Christ, but that was cemented around that which he had preached to them, which they had heard, which he had heard and seen and proclaimed to them.

He's talking about Jesus. So first of all, their fellowship together was grounded in the reality of Jesus. That's horizontal. But then he says, our, and indeed, oh man, that's a big word, indeed. He's emphasizing. He's saying, and by the way, get this. Our fellowship together is with God, the Father, the Trinity, the Father and his Son, Jesus Christ.

So when you and I come together and we are of one mind, we're not just hanging out with each other. The fellowship is the people of God gathering at the feet of the Father, as it were, playing at his feet, rejoicing in the Son, and we're doing this together.

That's why this is unique. And to miss this is to miss something very, very important for your soul.

[21:04] we tend to put the emphasis upon our personal devotions and not enough on the fellowship.

Well, that's because we're Americans. We're individualistic. You know, pull yourself up by your own bootstrap, Broderick, Elder, pull yourself up.

You can do it. You know, we conquered the West and the East and we're settlers. We get out there. We're all John Wayne. We can do it.

The problem is that's not biblical. That's not biblical thinking fully. Biblical thinking says we need together.

We need each other. For us to experience God even more deeply, we need to be together.

[22:08] Hoo, boy. Come on. You're killing me, John. We know we're supposed to show up, right?

We know that. Maybe drop a little something in the offering plate. But but as I have my quiet time, Pastor Kevin, all is good, right? Well, that's good.

Please do. But are you of one mind with your brothers and sisters? Are you really of one mind in being together?

Whether you are an introvert or extrovert is inconsequential. We put a lot of emphasis there. I want to back up on that and that's true. We're all different. Amen. There's room in the kingdom for

everybody.

You know what I'm saying? But don't but don't fall on that. I'm just an introvert, Pastor Kevin. And I can't. Don't, no, no, no, no, no. Don't take yourself away from the fellowship by talking about something about you.

[23 : 14] Let's focus on what God has done to bring you and make you a part of the body. You see, if Jesus has made you a part of the body, he has given you what you need, therefore, to engage the body.

The question is, are we going to take what he has given us, his spirit and his love and all, and let it flow and take the risk? We don't want to take the risk.

And we label it something. And we pull ourselves away from the blessing. Without devotion to the fellowship, your spiritual growth is impoverished.

Hebrews 3, 12, 14. Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart leading you to fall away from the living God.

But exhort one another every day as long as it is called today that none of you may be heartened by the deceitfulness of sin.

[24 : 28] What's he talking about? The fellowship. How are you going to be exhorted if you're not in the fellowship?

You need the body of Christ to exhort you, to encourage you, to warn you, to say, hello, brother. Slow down, sister. You need the body in your life so that the deceitfulness of sin doesn't harden you.

You know what happens when you are, you get, say you get injured. You know, you break a bone and you don't get it set properly by people who know what they're doing.

You know what happens? That bone will quasi-heal but it will be out of play. It will never be just right any longer because you didn't get it set properly.

Stay with me. In the fellowship, when the enemy gives us a sucker gut punch and he messes with our heads and our minds and we get offended or we get hurt or something happens, if we pull away from the fellowship and we don't allow the sense of God, mature believers, to come around, what happens is you end up getting hardened.

[25 : 58] your heart gets hard, bitterness sweeps in and we get deceived by sin because we have not allowed that bone to be set in the fellowship of the saints.

He says, one more verse, for we share in Christ if indeed, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end. Without the fellowship saints, without the exhorting one another that takes place in this, we begin to lose our solid foundation in what we believe.

Am I reading the text? I hope I'm reading the text right. He says, you know you share in Christ as you persevere. That's why we talk about perseverance of the saints.

God preserves his people but how does he do it? He preserves his people through the fellowship. Yes, he preserves us by his spirit but then his spirit will use people to help us continue to grow and hold on.

Listen, I need y'all. Oh my goodness. I mean, to know that ladies are praying right now, that helps me. When I'm down, when I'm discouraged, I reach out to you all, to several of you, Carl in particular and others.

[27 : 39] I reach out and say, brother, you got to help me get my head on straight. Rich who? Rich, I reach out to Rich and Rich will be like, okay, Kevin, let's talk. Brother Elder Sam and so many others.

I reach out and say, listen, help me, help me, listen to me. Okay, am I crazy? And they'll usually say, yes. But I need that.

Steph, don't you, you know what I'm saying? Don't you need that help sometimes? Oh, thank you, sister. Thank you, sister. Your confidence in the truth of the gospel can get shaken.

Show me a brother or sister who falls into gross sin or deep error and I will show you someone who was likely not in real fellowship with Christians who knew them.

We're finding this out time and time again. The stats are in, brothers and sisters. Pastors around this country have been falling for many years and every time that one of these guys, these high profile guys falls, we find out he was a lone ranger, accountable to nobody.

[28 : 46] But it's not just those guys, it's us guys. We need the togetherness of the fellowship so that we continue to grow in grace and knowledge.

We continue to be equipped for the work of ministry. Go to Ephesians 4, 11, and 16, read it when you get a chance. Time is escaping me, so I got to. But what you'll find out there is that spiritual maturity only comes about in the fellowship.

We're not grown up Christians if we're not in fellowship. I don't care how much Bible you know, how much theology, if you're not in fellowship where people, where iron is sharpening iron, if you're not together in presence and purpose with your brothers and sisters, you are not growing in Jesus. How do you know? Well, let me tell you, one of the ways we grow, right, is we love one another, right? Well, how do I know I love anybody if I ain't around nobody? We're told to forgive one another as God forgave us in Christ Jesus.

How do you know if you're forgiving if you haven't been offended by anybody because you're not around anybody to be offended? It's a simple math, right?

[30 : 08] I mean, one plus one equals two. I mean, let's think about it. We need to be in fellowship and stretched. How do you? It can't happen unless you are known and you are knowing and being known.

They were together. And that church was growing in its maturity. every spectator in the church weakens the fellowship because we are deprived of the gifts Christ has given you.

If you're a member of New City or any church wherever you are and you're not involved in the fellowship, you're sitting on the outskirts, you're hurting us. You don't mean to.

I'm not mad at you. You don't mean to. I'm just saying, don't you understand we need you? Your gifts are our gifts. My gifts belong to you.

Go back and read 1 Corinthians 12. The gifts of the Spirit are given, here's the phrase, for the common good. The common good. Even if you had the gift of speaking in tongues, it would be for the common good, not so you can feel good about yourself and think you're spiritual.

[31 : 37] They were together. This is not the Olympics where most of us are just watching a few people sweat, agonize, lose and win.

In true Christian fellowship, we are all in the games. grace. And therefore, we are all growing in grace together.

And in that fellowship, Jesus comes to fellowship. God, the Father, and the Son meets us in this fellowship, making us one that we might experience our neediness.

grace. And therefore, mutual dependence upon one another. Jesus did it for us saints.

He took on our humanity. The word became flesh. He came to be together with us. Oh my goodness.

[32 : 42] The second person of the glorious Trinity, the Son of God from all eternity, took on our humanity.

He didn't stand away from us. He came and joined us. He got down and dirty. Literally. Literally. He entered into every aspect of our humanity. saved sin. And even when it came to sin, he took our sin upon himself. He didn't do it.

He took it. His togetherness with us, praise the Lord, made it possible for him to save us.

His togetherness with us made it possible for him to represent us before the Father. Father. His togetherness with, and by the way, he will have our humanity a part of him for the rest of eternity.

[33 : 46] He will never give up our humanity. For all eternity, the eternal Son of God will bear the humanity of the Burks, of the Lewises, of the Smiths, of the Fitzgeralds.

Throughout all eternity, our humanity will be joined to the eternity of the Son. He will always represent us.

He will always be together with us. So when we say he's our Savior, when we say we've been joined to him, united with him, by faith in him, we are together with him.

When we say this, it has to mean something more than just my, he saved me and that's it. It's got to mean that he's living in me and that therefore I am now together with all those who call upon him.

And the only way I can express that togetherness is by being part of a local fellowship. fellowship. The fellowship. It has to mean what John says in 1 John 5, I believe, that I love you.

[35 : 12] How can we say, John says, how can we say we love God whom we have not seen if we do not love our brothers whom we have seen? Man, that's a slap in the face. And love involves biblically, now I'm just looking at what I'm saying here, what I'm saying, love has to involve togetherness.

It has to involve I need you. And you need me. And I'm addicted to you. In every good sense of the word in this passage.

That I need you. And I will not allow anything to come between me and you. Because the fellowship is the body of Christ.

Nothing should be allowed to come between us. Nothing. And no one. No ideology. Nothing. This fellowship, saints, listen, I'm done.

This fellowship is eternal. It's forever. All other fellowships will disappear.

[36 : 29] It's only in Christ that we will go into the kingdom of God. Without him, there's no real fellowship.

There's association. There's socializing. Good things. But not fellowship. fellowship. So let me ask you. Are you looking for ways to get connected to the fellowship?

Don't settle. Don't sit back and wait. Look for ways. Because of who Jesus and what he's done, we're basing this on, right? Because of who he is, he's our savior, Lord.

We are together in him. Because of this, don't sit back and wait to be invited into the fellowship. If you are here, you are a member, you're in the fellowship.

And if you're a regular attender and you're thinking about it, well, come on in. Get a sample of the fellowship. Don't sit on the sideline. Come on in. You're welcome.

[37 : 36] The word is fine. Oh, yeah. Listen, you're going to find some clicks here and there. Yeah, and every church has them.

But that's not the whole church. And if you're cliquish, you are doing harm to the fellowship. You better open them doors before Jesus makes you open them.

Open up. Let people, let your brothers and sisters in. Can we do that? Father, in Jesus' name, help us.

Oh, thank you that we are together. Thank you that we can be together. Oh, Lord, even without masks, for the most part, even if we do wear masks, Lord, thank you that masks did not keep us from seeing each other.

I saw people. Yeah, you saw us. Lord, help us. Help us to really traffic in true fellowship, in purpose, in presence.

[38 : 45] Oh, Lord, may we grow in grace together. In Jesus' name, amen.