



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Acts 15:7-14

“The Age of the Church, part II - Its Nature”

TRANSCRIPT

[Prayer] Heavenly Father, we again come to Thee with thanksgiving and praise for Thy word. We thank Thee that we are able to study it, that thou hast preserved it for us, and we are able to open up copies of it. And we thank Thee for the way in which Thou hast given us a divine interpreter, the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity to enlighten us and instruct us in the word. And we pray, Lord, that Thy wilt enable us to have open hearts and open minds to the teaching of the Holy Spirit. Deliver us, Lord, from many of the things that would prevent us from understanding Thee in the word. We pray for each one present that Thy blessing may be upon them spiritually. And now may, Lord, the Holy Spirit guide us in this hour and may through the teaching of the word, Jesus Christ be glorified. For we remember in Thy word that it is the office of the Holy Spirit to glorify him. So we commit this class to Thee with thanksgiving and praise. For Jesus' sake. Amen.

[Message] Tonight is the second in the series on the church. And remember, this is a new age for us, which began on the Day of Pentecost. The age of the law ended at the cross. Judgment was postponed. It was not until 70 AD that God demonstrated his displeasure with the nation Israel by bringing about the destruction of Jerusalem. And as

a result of the disobedience of Israel and ultimately the destruction of Jerusalem itself, the nation was scattered to the four corners of the earth and the gospel went out to the Gentiles. And so we're living in the day in which Israel is blinded and the gospel goes out primarily, though not exclusively, to the Gentiles.

Actually in this age the whole world is the recipient of the gospel and the end and aim of the preaching of the message. But you remember Paul says that "blindness in part hath happened to Israel until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in." And so while today there is an Israel of God, that is, believing Jews who have received Jesus Christ as savior, for the most part the church is made up of Gentiles.

Last time we looked at the descent of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost and we tried to show from the teaching of the word that the age of the church began on the Day of Pentecost. We tried to follow a line of evidence along this line: that the church is that group of individuals who have been baptized by the Holy Spirit into one body. And since the baptism of the Holy Spirit did not occur until the Day of Pentecost, the church could not have been in existence until then. But since it did occur on the Day of Pentecost, then the church began on the Day of Pentecost. And we showed from the Book of Acts that this was supported by the fact that the word church began to be mentioned from Acts chapter 5, verse 11 on. All references to the church, there are actually only three in the gospels, are future. So the church began on the Day of Pentecost.

Now tonight we want to take up the second part of the church's story and discuss "The Nature of the Church." Just exactly what is the church of the Lord Jesus Christ which began on the Day of Pentecost? What is its makeup? And I would like for you to turn with me to the first passage in Acts chapter 15, beginning with verse 14, page eleven-sixty-nine in the Scofield edition of the King's James Version.

And while you are finding this passage, or if you have already found it, let me say just a word about the context of it. Acts chapter 15 was a conference. It is generally

called a conference. It is not exactly a conference such as the Baptist General Conference or something like that. But it was a conferring with Jerusalem on the part of the church at Antioch. And they came together to consider the question, Should a Jew or Gentile be circumcised in order to be saved? In other words, was it necessary for them to undergo this rite which marked out the Jew in the Old Testament period?

And so after they had had a good bit of discussion and disagreement over this matter, Paul and Barnabas went up to the apostles and elders about this question. And they went on up and Luke describes how they went through Phenice and Samaria and they told of the conversion of the Gentiles. This, of course, was what produced the problem, because the Jews were debating the question: Should not they be circumcised, after all, was not this a biblical requirement? Abraham was given this and Jews down through the years had been circumcised. So it was a natural question for them. Remember, they did not have the New Testament as we have it now, and the Scriptures for them were the Scriptures of the Old Testament. So it was easy for them to be confused over a matter such as this.

So they came. And according to Acts 15 they had a private meeting, and Paul declared the things that God had done with them together with Barnabas. And then finally they came to the large public meeting in which the apostles and elders of Jerusalem were present with them. And in verse 7 of Acts chapter 15 we read,

"And when there had been much disputing. (It's perfectly alright to dispute a little in the church of Christ, you know. Some people are little afraid of having any kind of discussion but there was much disputing in this assembly. And finally) "Peter rose up, and said unto them, Men and brethren, ye know how that a good while ago God made choice among us, that the Gentiles by my mouth should hear the word of the gospel, and believe. (Now of course he refers to the incident in Cornelius' house. It was there that the Gentiles as a group heard the gospel and believed.) And God, which knoweth the

hearts, bare them witness, giving them the Holy Ghost, even as he did unto us; (That is us who were Jews.) And put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith. Now therefore why tempt ye God, to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear? (In other words, why put them under the Law of Moses. We were never able to bear the Law of Moses. We could not keep it. We did not have enablement to undertake it. So why should we put these Gentiles who have believed and have received the gospel and have been purified by faith, why should we put them under the yoke of the law?) But we believe (Verse 11, now this is The Apostle's Creed.) But we believe that through the grace of the LORD Jesus Christ we shall be saved, (we Jews) even as they (they Gentiles)."

So we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they. You can see from this that Peter interprets circumcision as a work, not grace. Well now, that's not the point tonight. We don't want to go over that issue again. We want to get on to what is said about the church.

"Then all the multitude kept silence, and gave audience to Barnabas and Paul, declaring what miracles and wonders God had wrought among the Gentiles by them. And after they had held their peace, James answered, saying, Men and brethren, hearken unto me: Simeon (that is Peter) Peter has declared how God at the first (or for the first time, that word means in this context,) for the first time did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name."

Now the thing I want you to notice is James' description of the church of Jesus Christ here. He calls it a "people for his name" and that God has "visited the Gentiles to take out of them a people for his name." In other words, it is a people taken out from among the Gentiles for his name.

Now you remember that last time when we were looking at the term *ekklēsia* which means church, I was saying that this word comes from the word *ek* which means out from plus *kaleō* which means to call, to call out. So that *ekklēsia*, you've seen it no doubt, this is the Latin term and transliterated into English, the *ecclesia*. This is a called out group. This is the term used in the New Testament to describe the church. It is a called out group of people who assemble in the Lord's name. And so, to call the church an assembly is really the best name that we can possibly give it, for that is what that term means.

As a matter of fact, *ekklēsia* was used of political gatherings. Now Lucille just recently was in Washington at a political *ecclesia*, that is, a called out group of people who met together to discuss ways and means of getting a better president than the one we have, I suppose. So that was an assembly.

Now in the New Testament you will find this word occasionally. In Ephesus for example when the people came together, it is called a church, that is, it is a group of people who meet together.

Now, that is the real name for church. Remember last time, I said that the word church, which we use to translate this, is a word that ultimately comes from the word *kyriōkos* which means belonging to the Lord. Now it's true that the church does belong to the Lord. But it is also true that that word is really not the best word to describe the church of the New Testament. It is a called out assembly: a group of people who are selected by the Lord out from among the Gentiles and also from the Jews (There are a few of them, too, the Israel of God) and they make up the church or the assembly.

Really the best term for church is assembly, but I don't think we'll ever be able to transform everybody's thinking on this point. And so if you call the church: church, that's all right, just remember that it means belonging to the Lord. If you call the church: assembly, it means a group of people who have been called out by the Lord.

Now here in this statement of James you see how that though he does not use the term *ekklesia*, he nevertheless has the idea, for he says, "Simeon hath declared how God for the first time did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name." So, the church is a group of people who are called out by the gospel in behalf of the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now the church is looked at in the New Testament in several different ways. I'm going to select, I think, the two most important ways in which the church is looked at. It is looked at first of all as a local church and then it is looked as a universal church. We generally speak of the local church as the church visible, the universal church as the church invisible. These terms are not absolutely accurate, but let's just say local and universal.

And I want you to now turn with me, if you will, to 1 Corinthians chapter 1 and verse 2, for here we have a reference to the church local. 1 Corinthians 1:2. "Paul called to be an apostle" this is page twelve-eleven. "Paul called to be an apostle of Jesus Christ through the will of God, and Sosthenes our brother, Unto the church of God which is at Corinth."

Now you can see that he uses the term church here to represent the assembly of people who meet in the Lord's name in the specific place of Corinth, "the church of God at Corinth."

Now let me stop for just a moment and say a word about this, because I think it is important that we clarify these things in our minds. In the New Testament there is no church called after a man's name.

Now there were no denominations originally. In other words, in God's mind the whole church was to be one. And in the earliest days of the local church, all believers were one in the Lord Jesus Christ. As a matter of fact, they were so few in most places that all of the believers met together. There is some evidence in the New Testament of some house churches in various spots, that is, more than one in one spot. But the

evidence is not definite and we know it was not until a much later time when there began to be more than one church in a locale. But these churches were not named after a man's name.

Now I hope you will not think that I'm attacking your church when I say what I'm going to say tonight. It is not my intention to do that. It is my intention that you think clearly about this.

For example, you do not find anything in the New Testament like the Lutheran Church, that is, a church named after a man, though we, of course, thank God for Martin Luther and what he has done. But there is no such thing in the New Testament as the Lutheran Church.

There is no such in the New Testament as the Presbyterian Church, which of course is a name derived from presbyteros which means elder and has to do with the form of government, that is, the name is based upon the form of government. The Lutheran Church is not based upon the form of government but upon the one who founded it, that is its name.

The Episcopalian Church, that term is based upon the word episkopos which means an overseer, that is another term for an elder. And it is designed to be a term that reflects its government, too. Episcopalian Church, that is, it is a church that is ruled by bishops or episkopoi, bishops.

Now the Methodist Church, as you know, is a term which is related to, actually it was a nickname given to John Wesley and some of the early followers of John who gathered and had a specific type of pious meeting in which they sought the face of God. And because they had certain definite steps in the way in which they met, they were called Methodists, that is, they followed a certain method. And that was something of a term of contempt in those days. They were those Methodists, you know. So there is a term, the name of that church is based upon a term of contempt which people used with reference to Wesley who was himself an Anglican or Episcopalian.

Now I say all of this because I want you to notice as you read through the New Testament that never is the church called by any man's name, for there were no such things as denominations.

As a matter of fact, I'm quite sure, and I think most denominational men will grant this today, with the ecumenical movement being so strong, that the idea of a separation in the body of Christ is surely not in the New Testament. Just go on and read now beginning with verse 10 where we begin to see some divisions in the Corinthian church and listen to what Paul has to say about this.

"Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment. For it hath been declared unto me of you, my brethren, by them which are of the house of Chloe, that there are contentions among you. Now this I say, that every one of you saith, I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ. Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were ye baptized in the name of Paul?"

So you can see that Paul does not like this division that is developing in the church at Corinth where one many is saying "I am of Paul" "I am of Apollos" "I am of Cephas". And then perhaps some who were withdrawing from the others and saying, "I am of Christ" The church is one.

Now Paul's use of the term then in 1 Corinthians 1:2 is a reference to a local church in a specific locale. He calls it here the church of God.

Now there are one or two other things I want you to notice about the word church in the New Testament. You don't have time to read through it tonight, so you'll just have to take my word for this, but I think you will agree if you've read much in the New Testament that I'm probably right. And if you don't think I'm right, then I challenge

you to begin at Matthew. Well you needn't begin at Matthew; read Matthew 16 and Matthew 18, and those are the only chapters which refer to the church until we get to the Book of Acts. Just begin at the Book of Acts and read through the New Testament and see if what I say is not the teaching of the New Testament now.

No where in the New Testament is the building in which they met called a church. Now we frequently drive down the street and we see a massive building and we say, That is the First So-and-so Church. But that is not the First So-and-so Church if it is a Christian church building according to the New Testament, for never in the New Testament is a building called a church. A building is a place where the church meets.

Now the Church of Christ, I think is absolutely right in this. I think, now Paul you may check me up on this and see if I'm right here, they frequently will say outside of their buildings: The Church of Christ meets here. Now that is right. That is right, because you see that is an attempt to distinguish between the building and the people, for the building is not the church. The people are the church.

Now you drive down Swiss Avenue and you'll come to Carroll and there is the Scofield Memorial Church, but that is not the Scofield Memorial Church. That is the building in which the believers who meet there meet. And you know it's an interesting thing, and it's born out by history, that many of the denominations today which speak of their church building used to be more scriptural in their terminology. If you will go up into New England, you will find many times references to the meetinghouse.

Now the meetinghouse was the place where the church met. And they called it the meetinghouse. And in so doing they were being absolutely scriptural. But you see, since we have drifted so far from the Bible, we also drift into error, even in the names that we give of the church itself. So never in the New Testament is a building called the church.

Now I challenge you just to go to the Book of Acts and read through the rest of the New Testament and see if you cannot make me out a liar in a friendly way in this case [Laughter] because it really is not there .

Furthermore, as I've already said, the word church is not used of a denomination as we use it today. And also, it is not used of a national church as it is sometimes used today. For example, in Scotland where I studied for a good while, the leading church in Scotland is the Church of Scotland. That is its name. That is a national church, not in the strictest sense but almost so. And it suits for my illustration. We could say the Anglican Church, except that they don't use the, well they do, too. The Church of England, we'll just use that because that is a national church for England. Now that church, the Church of England is also an unbiblical name, though there are many godly people in the Church of England. Don't misunderstand me.

The point is that in the New Testament the word church is not used of building. It is not used of denomination. It is not used of a national church. It is used of the people who meet in the name of the Lord. They are the church. A church is a living organism. Whether locally or universally it is a group of people who have believed in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now I'm going to, may I pull your leg just a little bit? Will you turn with me to the epistle of Paul to Philemon? And I want to show you how strange it would be for the word church to be a church building. Philemon. Now we haven't had occasion to turn to Philemon. The epistle of Paul the apostle to Philemon, page twelve-hundred and eighty-six.

Now some of you may be having difficulty, perhaps you've called it Philemon all of these years, but it's really Philemon. The epistle of Paul to Philemon, page twelve-hundred and eighty-six, Steve. You're getting close, there you are. I always figure that when he has it, the rest of you have it. [Laughter] So, he's a good man. He takes my kidding very well.

Now, Philemon. Now notice verse 1. "Paul, a prisoner of Jesus Christ, and Timothy our brother, unto Philemon our dearly beloved, and fellow labourer," Now you see this little church which was in Colossae met apparently in Philemon's house. So we read in verse 2, "And to our beloved Apphia, (now that was Mrs. Philemon) Archippus (that was Philemon's son) "our fellow soldier, and to the church in thy house."

Now if the church is a church building, Philemon must have had an awfully large house. How would you like to have a house so large that you could have a church in it as something like an ornament, you know? For that is what this text would mean, you see. "And to the church which is in thy house."

Now I don't think that even H. L. Hunt has a home big enough to put a church in it. You see, the word church is a reference to the group of people who met in the name of the Lord.

So, the church there now, what are we going to call our church, then? Well we're going to try to keep in mind that the church has in view the people who have believed in the Lord Jesus Christ. And this text in 1 Corinthians chapter 1, verse 2 is a reference to the group of believers who met in Corinth together.

Now where they met was incidental. Whenever they met, there was the church. Whether they met in someone's home, whether they met on a street corner, whether they met out in a field under a tree, there was the church.

By the way, historically there is no evidence of a church building devoted to a group of believers, that is, a place where they met regularly. Historically, there is no evidence of such a building until the third century A.D.

So you see, the early believers met in homes for the most part. There was the church. So if you're starting a new little church and you have to meet in a home, that's perfectly alright. That's biblical. That's the way the church of Jesus Christ met. And if we look down our noses at a group of people who meet in the church, we only confess thereby that we do not have much of the same spirit that the early church had.

Well, now there's another sense in which this word church is used. It is used of the universal church. Someone has spoken of this as the invisible church, but that's not exactly accurate. Universal. Let's turn over to 1 Corinthians chapter 12 and verse 13. 1 Corinthians 12 and verse 13.

Here remember Paul had said "For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit." And remember we said that the way we enter into the church is by the baptism of the Holy Spirit which makes us into the one body.

Now turn to Ephesians chapter 1. Ephesians chapter 1 and verse 22 and 23. Here Paul says, "And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, Which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all."

Now in Ephesians chapter 1, verses 22 and 23 where Paul speaks of the church which is the body of Christ, he apparently envisages not just a local group in one place, but all who have believed on the Lord Jesus Christ as composing one body in Christ. So there is a sense in which the word church is used of a particular locality, the believers there. And then there is a sense in which all of the believers everywhere form one body of the Lord Jesus Christ, one called out assembly.

Now this is what our Lord had in mind when he said in Matthew chapter 16 in verse 18, "That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my assembly." Now he did not mean one particular assembly, but he meant the whole assembly of believers in Lord Jesus Christ.

Well now, this is a very interesting thing. The church then is local and the church is universal. The church is in a particular locality, the group of believers who honor Jesus Christ. The church also is composed of all who have believed in him whether they be on the earth or even in heaven, for ultimately the whole church shall be united with the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. Well now then the church is local. This church is universal.

Let me say a word now about the mission of the church. What is the church to do? Why do we have a body of Christ? Well there are two sides to the mission of the church. One is extensive and by this I mean it is a mission that extends outside itself. Extensive. And then also, intensive. And let's just take Acts 1:8 for its extensive mission and Acts 2:42 for its intensive mission.

Let's look at Acts chapter 1 and verse 8, first of all. This is a familiar text. I'm sure that we all know this. Acts chapter 1 and verse 8, the mission of the church. The Lord Jesus is giving now the apostolic commission and he says, " But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me." By the way, do you notice it does not say witnesses unto the church, for the church's object is not to glorify itself but to glorify the Lord? "Witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth."

Now it is very important that we understand why the church is here. Why do you think the church is here? Is the church here in order to be responsible for social reform in the earth? Well, it is true that the church does indirectly affect the social standards of the people among whom we live. The church does affect our culture. The things that we proclaim ultimately must have a response in life. And so there must be a difference among the people who have received the gospel from those who have not. We do have a social effect upon the people about us, but that is not the mission of the church. It is not the mission of the church to preach a social gospel though that may be an effect, social betterment. The mission of the church is to be a witness of the Lord Jesus Christ.

J. Vernon McGee, a good friend of some of you in this room, loves to say the church is to extend the testimony of the Lord Jesus. When God called Israel out of Egypt, he did not call them out to plant flowers in the wilderness on the way to the Promised Land. He called them to be a witness unto him in order that he might bring them to that land. They were not told amid the wilderness to beautify it.

And so we, we are here in the wilderness of this world. We are foreigners here, because you see we are ambassadors. Our citizenship is in heaven. Our home is the New Jerusalem. If you like Dallas, and I hope you do, I hope you're not like these people who are jumping all over Dallas today, and you love Dallas, well, that's very good. But you're going to have a much better home someday. You're going to be in the New Jerusalem. And that's wonderful. So we are foreigners, you see. And we're not here to beautify the world. We are to witness concerning the Lord Jesus Christ. That is our mission. We are to tell others about him, attempt to build up men in the word of God.

Someone has said, you know, the trouble with the church today is that the church has not caught the spirit of the age. If the church would just catch the spirit of the age, everything would be alright. But it is not the duty of the church to catch the spirit of the age. It is the duty of the church to correct through the gospel the spirit of the age. And there is a lot of difference between the two.

So our mission is to evangelize, to be witnesses of the Lord Jesus extensively toward the earth, toward the world, toward the people about us, we are to be witnesses of the Lord Jesus. That means, you know, that our lights must be lit.

You remember the story of Mose. It was his duty in the days when they used to have those little buildings, you know, where the man came out with the lantern to wave so that people came to a crossing might stop, you know, before they had these signals. I know some of you are looking blank. I don't believe I'm that much older than some of you. But anyway, I remember that, and I remember those little places where, you know, when the train would come, a colored man would come out with a red lantern and he would stand out and wave like this and that meant stop, the train's coming.

Well one day he went out and he waved and the train came but nevertheless people went by and the train ran into an automobile. And so there was a court case. And the company trained Mose in just what he was to say. And so they managed to win the case. And finally they noticed that Mose after they won the case seemed very much

disturbed. And they went up to him and said, What's the matter, Mose? He said, well, I's glad we won the case but I's scared to death they'd asked me if my lamp was lit.

[Laughter]

Now there are lots of Christians, you know, who are out waving a lantern that is not lit. If we are going to be really effective witnesses for the Lord Jesus, our lantern must be lit. That means that we must have this life that we talk about. So when we are to be witnesses of the Lord Jesus, that means we are to have that life. Well that's our extensive mission.

But turn to verse 42 of Acts chapter 2 and let's look at the intensive mission, the internal we could call it, the other external. Acts 2 verse 42.

Now in this text which I think is an extremely important passage for the church and its witness and ministry. Remember it occurs right after the Day of Pentecost. Three thousand souls have been added. And in verse 42, Luke says, "And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers."

Now, let's analyze this for just a moment. This is the church's internal ministry. This internal ministry, if you look at the English text, you would say, Well, it's very simple. It is composed of four things. It is composed of the apostles' doctrine, fellowship, breaking of bread, and prayers. That's pretty simple, isn't it? Doctrine, fellowship, breaking of bread, prayers. This is to make up the work of the local church toward itself. This is what we are to do. We're to study the word of God. We're to have fellowship. We are to pray. We are to break bread. It's not quite so simple as that. But let me talk about the first word first. "They continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine." In the apostle's teaching.

Now do you see here the preeminent place in the local church of the teaching of the word of God? What kind of a church is it? What kind of a church can it be which

hardly ever opens up the apostle's doctrine and studies it, much less, continue steadfastly within it?

Obviously, such a church cannot be a New Testament church in the fullest sense, for at the foundation of the local church is continuing steadfastly in the apostle's doctrine. This is extremely important. This is why the church has gone astray today. This is why we have such an ineffective church. They have not continued steadfastly in the apostle's doctrine. If we would continue steadfastly in this teaching, we would know what we are to do.

May I illustrate from personal experience? When I graduated from college, I had it very easy. I was thinking about going to Harvard Business School, but due to some desire to be next to a young lady in Alabama and since my father already had a business in Alabama and all I had to do is just get on the train and go there, and it would be a job for me and ultimately a business that was mine, well, I went to Birmingham and went in business. Of course, God's hand was over it all because it was in Birmingham that I was to find the Lord.

When I went into my father's business in Birmingham, Alabama, which was the insurance business, I was told that I was to do some underwriting for a year or two, learn something about the insurance business in that way, and then ultimately get out on the road and travel and try to drum up some business, and then finally of course I should expect to advance. Well now I remember, that although I was a college graduate and nobody in the office in which I worked, that is the immediate office, not my father's partner, and not some of the other executives, but in the immediate office in which I worked in which there were four or five girls and one other man, I think I was the only one that had a college degree.

Now this, it would have seemed, would have made me the best insurance man in the office immediately. But unfortunately, it didn't. I learned that knowing something about the insurance business is a lot different from getting a college degree. And a

college degree with a major in Latin and Greek did not help me much in the insurance business. In fact, I had a difficult time in that I had to learn how to file daily reports; Felix knows what I'm talking about over here. I had to learn how to file daily reports. I had to learn how to underwrite from someone who was, well at least my intellectual inferior I thought, so I thought at that time particularly. In fact, do you know I was paid the monstrous salary of seventy-five dollars a month for two or three months? And then I got a big raise to one hundred dollars a month. Can you think of that? And I managed to survive too, on one hundred dollars a month.

But let me tell you. Even though that money sounds like it is nothing to you, it was really a pure gift. Do you know why? Because I was of absolutely no use to that company for the first year. [Laughter] For the first year I was of absolutely no use to them. I had to learn the business. And until I learned the business, I could not expect to contribute anything to the premium income of that general agency.

Now you see, this same principle we follow in business constantly. We wouldn't think of hiring an inexperienced man and putting him in a responsible position. But the church of Jesus Christ does that every day and thinks nothing about it. They do it everyday and think nothing at all about it. The text says they continued steadfastly in the apostle's doctrine. And it was only by learning the truth of God's word that they were fitted to do the work of God.

Now that is extremely important, extremely important. And that is the reason why we have failed so. We have not gone to our manual. For our manual of life and doctrine is the word of God, the apostle's doctrine. We are to continue steadfastly in it. That's the first duty of the church.

The second thing we read is "and fellowship." Now I must give you a little Greek lesson here. This word fellowship has been much misunderstood. Some have said: Fellowship, that means a church social. Fellowship, that means a church Supper. Fellowship, that means a bazaar. Fellowship, that means bingo on Thursday night.

Fellowship, that means square dancing. Fellowship. You see, that's a very broad term, fellowship. That can be made to mean almost anything. That might even be made to mean a golf foursome on Sunday morning while the preacher is preaching. Fellowship. That's good fellowship too I'll assure you. [Laughter] But that isn't what that word means.

Now if you look at this in the Greek text, you will discover that most likely, in view of the construction of this Greek sentence, that this word fellowship is defined by the next two words. In fact, if we were to translate this accurately I think it should be rendered like this: "And they continued steadfastly in the apostle's doctrine and fellowship," a fellowship consisting of the "breaking of bread and prayers." In other words, the third and fourth nouns are designed to be explanatory of the second or fellowship, so breaking of bread and prayers. This is the fellowship in which they continued. So the local church was engaged in three things: Doctrine: study of the word of God. Breaking of bread: The Lord's Supper. Prayers: Bringing their requests to the Lord.

Now let's stop for a moment and talk about breaking of bread and prayers. We have doctrine, teaching, breaking of bread. Now most likely the breaking of bread in the light of 1 Corinthians 11, 12, 13, 14 and also in the Book of Acts is a reference to the Lord's Supper. You see, the Lord's Supper loomed large in the early church. The reason for that is very simple. On the last night, the night of the Passover, the Lord Jesus in a very solemn ceremony instituted the Lord's Supper.

Now the Lord's Supper was designed to be a memorial of the Lord Jesus Christ. It was the New Testament equivalent of the Passover of the Old Testament. That is why in the Passover supper, after they have had the last Passover, the Lord Jesus introduces the first Lord's Supper. That you see is the visible token of the new covenant, which is the most important covenant ever made between God and men, the new covenant which promises redemption through the Lord Jesus Christ.

So when the apostles and the early church met, they met to study the word of God, they met to break bread, to fellowship with the Lord Jesus for he had promised to be there, and to remember him. You see, this would keep constantly before them the fact that Lord Jesus Christ was alive.

Now this is one thing that we also are lacking today. It is not so much that we do not meet to observe the Lord's Supper constantly. I think we ought to do that. As you know, most of you know that I think we ought to do this every Sunday, because in the New Testament that was the practice of the apostles. And the practice of the apostles is the best interpretation of their teaching. Apostolic practice is most likely apostolic precept, for they said, "Be followers of me as I am of the Lord."

But you know, the thing that means the most to me in the Lord's Supper is the fact that Jesus Christ is present. And we have this opportunity to fellowship with him and remember that which he has done for us. So in the early church they met together on the first day of the week to remember him.

Let's turn over to Acts chapter 20 and verse 7. Paul was at Troas, and you know we cannot be certain about this in the dogmatic sense, that is we cannot say this is doctrine, but we do notice that in the 6th verse Paul, as Luke puts it, "Sailed away from Philippi after the days of unleavened bread, and came unto them to Troas in five days; where we abode seven days."

Apparently they arrived in Troas on a Monday according to Jewish reckoning of time; it would be seven days until the Sunday. And so they stayed in Troas all of that time, apparently, in order to be with the assembly on the Lord's Day.

Now notice the 7th verse, "And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to" hear a sermon. No, they did not come together to hear a sermon. "On the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to" pray. No, not to pray. "On the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to" have fellowship. No,

not to have fellowship. You see, as Luke puts it, they came together with the purpose of breaking bread. That was their purpose.

Now accompanying this was the preaching of the word. "Upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them, ready to depart on the morrow; and continued his speech until midnight."

Now, there is a good apostolic practice that we ought to follow "til midnight". Did I tell you, I've told all of my friends this at one time or another, you know I love my wife. Some of her remarks, I don't like. But one night I was just acting a little frisky, like husbands sometimes do and ought not to do around their wives, you know, and I said, Mary, I think I'm going to preach like the apostles tonight. She said, Oh, what do you mean? I said, Well, Paul preached until midnight, and I think I will tonight. She said, That was Paul. [Laughter] I got the point.

Well now, you notice here, " Upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them." So they came together to break bread.

Now will you turn back with me, our time is almost up, to Acts chapter 3, for the apostles and the others also prayed. So we have apostle doctrine, breaking of bread and prayers.

Now in Acts chapter 3, of course, we read in the early church the separation between the church and the synagogue was not made immediately. The early church continued their ministry among the Jews as long as the Jews would let them. But them finally when the Jews closed the door, then they had to go out and meet by themselves.

In Acts chapter 3 in verse 1 we read, "Now Peter and John went up together into the temple at the hour of prayer, being the ninth hour." Apparently they were intending to pray. So they continued this individual prayer ministry in connection with Israel. But ultimately they were not allowed to do this. But we do read in the 4th chapter of the earliest type of prayer meeting.

Now again, I may surprise you just a little bit, but I don't think in the early church that they had a regular Wednesday evening prayer meeting. Now some of you may be a little disturbed by this, because you see, you have been so used to this that you just cannot conceive of the fact that a church can be spiritual church which does not have a regular Wednesday evening prayer meeting. I could talk an awful lot pro that and I could talk an awful lot con that. For I think from a lot of experience that many of our weekly regular prayer meetings have disintegrated into the saying of the same old prayers and the same old phrases about the same old things about which we have prayed many, many times but lacking faith have not really committed it to the Lord but still keep bringing it up before him.

And occasionally, perish the thought, but occasionally when opportunities are given in our prayer meetings for prayer requests, they become opportunities for some to get up who like to hear those voices to talk about all of the little details of their life during that week which really does not concern the saints too much and I'm sure the Lord even less. But nevertheless, in the early church. Will you pardon those harsh words? Just take a little bit of the truth out of them and forget the other.

On the other hand, there is something to be said about prayer, and we must not neglect prayer. Because some have misused it. Now in the early church we read in verse 23 of chapter 4, "And being let go, they went to their own company, and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said unto them. And when they heard that." In other words, the early church met whenever they had a definite need. If there was a definite need in the early church, they said, Let's have a prayer meeting.

Now you can be sure in a prayer meeting like this you have vital prayer. This is why I say so many of our prayer meetings today are not vital, because they are not related to the needs that may exist. So, "When they heard that, they lifted up their voice to God."

You know, in the early church they sent messages to God. Today we send messages to men. Please help us build the building. Please help us send in your pledge, and so on, you know. The early church sent their messages to God. And so they got divine answers. "When they heard that, they lifted up their voice to God with one accord, and said, Lord, thou art God," and then they have this wonderful prayer which is followed by a strange answer, an earthquake. Their prayers were so powerful that they produced earthquakes. But they prayed.

Well, our time is practically up. Let me just summarize what we've said. The early church was a church which had a local meeting. It was also a church of believers in the Lord Jesus Christ in the universal sense. The church is twofold, local, universal. Its ministry is extensive, that is, it is to be a witness of the Lord Jesus. Within itself, it is to be characterized by the teaching of the word of God, the breaking of bread and prayers. These are the ministries of the church within itself, so that it might build itself up.

Now how shall we do this? How will we study the word, how will we be built up so that we may carry on the ministry that the Lord has given to us? I'm going to read a passage and I think I will say something about it next time. But let's read Ephesians chapter 4, for here we have God's method of accomplishing the growth of the local church. Ephesians 4:7 through 16 and we will stop after I have read through this passage.

Now this passage has to do with spiritual gifts, gifted men who are given to the church. May I challenge you also with one more thing? Nowhere in the New Testament, nowhere in the New Testament is any one man ever called "the pastor" with one exception. One man is called "the shepherd" of the church: The Lord Jesus Christ. Did you know that? Did you know that?

Would you sometime just open up the New Testament again and read through for "the pastor"? Now isn't that startling? What church do you know does not have "the pastor"? How can you get along without "the pastor"? And do you know that the early church did not have "the pastor." Does that shock you? Does that surprise you? I hope it

doesn't. There is a wonderful truth involved in this. We'll say a little bit about it next time.

But let's look at this. Here Paul is talking about spiritual gifts, not offices, gifted men.

"But unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ. (Every one of us has a spiritual gift) Wherefore he saith, When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men. Now that he ascended, what is it but that he also descended first into the lower parts of the earth? He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that he might fill all things. And he gave some, or And he gave apostles; and prophets; and evangelists and pastors and teachers."

Now if you look at this in the Greek text, you will discover that this word pastor and teacher, they are linked together by one article, and most likely are to be understood as pastor-teachers. Now mind you, it is not stated that there is only one of these in the church. And furthermore, it is not an office. It is a gift, pastor-teacher. A man who has a gift of teaching and a gift of shepherding. Pastor-teachers.

For, why do we have these gifted men? Why do we have evangelists, prophets, pastor-teachers, and so on? "For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ." And may I read that, and you just listen to me as I read this as the Greek text puts it. "For the perfecting of the saints, for a work of ministry, for edifying the body of Christ."

You see what Paul means is not that these men are to do the work of the ministry, but these men are to equip the saints, so that they may do the work of the ministry. Did you know who's to do the work of the ministry? Did you think that the pastor is? Did you think they that a pastor-teacher is to do the work of the ministry? Oh, no.

Who is to do the work of ministry? You, if you're a believer in Christ, you are to do it. These gifted men in the local church, they are to equip you so that you do it. They are to teach you the apostle's doctrine so you may witness for the Lord Jesus Christ. That's the divine pattern.

Now if you think that's strange, that shows you the weakness of the church today. Well let me finish it.

"Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ: That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ: From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love."

[Prayer] Heavenly Father, we thank Thee for this wonderful picture of the body of Christ, and we pray, Lord, that we may continue in the apostle's doctrine, in the breaking of bread and prayers, the fellowship which is fellowship indeed. For we ask it in Christ's name. Amen.