

The Holy Spirit and the Church Today

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Well, we are blessed to have had such music to prepare our hearts for the word of God today. I'm so grateful to the Lord that he has brought you all on such a day as this for us to open the word of God together to see what Scripture says and to let it search us; to trust that it will change us; that it will comfort us where comfort is necessary; that it will reprove us where reproof is necessary all in keeping with the purpose of Scripture that God has given to the church; that it is able to correct and to reprove and to train us in righteousness that the man of God may be fully equipped, adequate for every good work. So we come to the Scriptures this morning with earnestness. We come with a sense of desire to see what they really say. We come with a desire to open our hearts, as it were, to the Spirit of God as we teach about the Spirit of God, and to allow him to come as it were, move freely in our thoughts, move freely in our hearts, to affirm and reprove us where that may be necessary.

I think it might be helpful for you to know that I have been preparing this series that we have loosely titled "The Holy Spirit Today," I've been working on this over the course of several months and so the nature of the things that I have to say today have been percolating in my mind for a very long time and that may be helpful to you a little bit later on to remember. In time, what we want to do is we want to eventually address the controversial sign gifts, miracles and tongues and prophecy, and we'll deal with those down the road. For now, however, we're laying a foundation of the work of the Holy Spirit in that what today is his sometimes forgotten ministry which is actually far more important and far more immediately relevant to every one of us that gather together here today. I should tell you that I freely state, I freely acknowledge that I'm being selective in what I choose to speak about with the ministry of the Holy Spirit. That's by nature of necessity. One writer lists out 27 different ministries of the Holy Spirit which Scripture points to, and so we're not going to cover all of those, we're just trying to cover certain key high points that would be instructive for us for how we came to be a Christian, and also for what the Spirit does in our midst, and what he does in our hearts today. So that's the spirit in which we, no pun intended but I gave one anyway, that's the spirit in which we approach this series on the Spirit titled "The Holy Spirit Today."

Last time, we pointed out that there would be no Christians anywhere if it were not for the Holy Spirit. It is only by the powerful work of the Holy Spirit in the work of regeneration imparting new life to dead sinners, his indwelling of true Christians and his

sanctifying work on our behalf, those are the things that make spiritual life possible. It is only through the Holy Spirit that we are led to Christ as he works in the word.

Look at James 1:18. I meant to turn to this verse last time and instead looked at verse 21, and so I'm kind of correcting myself here. But we see this, this aspect of the work of the Spirit through the word of God when James says in chapter 1, verse 18, actually let's start in verse 17, "Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above." Well the greatest, the most perfect gift that God gives to men is his gift of salvation in Jesus Christ, the forgiveness of sin, the imputation of righteousness, which secures for us a certainty that it will go well for us on judgment day. Justification is the gift of God that gives us an immediate imputation of the righteousness of Christ and that secures for us the understanding that when judgment day comes, God will accept us, God will receive us, God will not hold our sins against us because he's already punished our sins in Christ at the cross. That is our gift that God imparts to us now, a complete and full forgiveness in Christ; he gives that to us as a gift when we respond to the Gospel call to repent of sin and put our faith in Christ alone for our salvation. That's the great gift. That's the ultimate and perfect gifts from above.

Look at James 1:17 now, "Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow." God having given us salvation, is not going to change his mind. He's not like that. Praise be to God that he's not like that, that he's not like we are. We are changing from day to day. Sometimes we're in a good mood, sometimes we're in a bad mood. Sometimes things are going well for us, sometimes they're not, and the way that we interact with people is affected accordingly. It's not like that with God. There is not that kind of variation with us. His love is perfect toward his own and it goes out unbroken, unchanging, and is ever secure for us. So, yes, we sing of the wondrous love of Jesus that secured that for us.

Now in verse 18, look at it with me. It says, "In the exercise of His will He brought us forth by the word of truth." God brought us forth in an exercise of his will, as the word of God was applied by the Spirit of God to our hearts, he brought us forth so that we might be a kind of firstfruits among his creatures. God worked by the Holy Spirit in our hearts in order to enable us to believe in Christ and to be saved. This was the exercise of his will that we came to saving faith in Christ. That's why we say that no one would be a Christian except by the Holy Spirit.

So last time we looked at those things: regeneration, indwelling and sanctification. Today we want to continue on and build on that and last time, you could say, that we looked at the work of the Holy Spirit in the believer, kind of looking at the way the Spirit applies salvation to an individual heart and what he does, he comes and indwells an individual believer, has a sanctifying impact on the individual believer, the Spirit of God regenerates us and indwells us and what follows is a work of sanctification that ever conforms us to closer conformity to the image of Christ.

Now we want to build on that and expand it out a little bit because what happens when a church comes into being like Truth Community Church? Well, a true church, the true members of a true church are true Christians which means that all of us that have been born again participate in a common life in Christ. We have been given the same gift of salvation worked out in our hearts by the same Spirit and we enjoy the same benefits. I don't have a better salvation than you do. You don't have a better one than I do. God has saved us in perfection and so we share in that forgiveness, we share in the indwelling Spirit, we share in the eternal purpose of God that he works out among his people from eternity past into eternity future. We are greatly blessed to share in all of these great gifts together and what that means as we come together as the people of God, as we come together in the context of a local church, this is so important in this individualistic day and age in which we live, it is not simply that God is doing a work in us individually as if we were 250 different silos on a field someplace, there is a corporate work of the Spirit that takes place that we need to understand, that we need to respect, that is going to reprove, correct, and help us as we go through it here today.

Now, as the Spirit indwells us, we're going to cover four aspects of the work of the Spirit here today looking toward a corporate dimension to this work. First of all, what is true of every believer? There is a work of empowerment that the Holy Spirit does. There is a work of empowerment that the Holy Spirit does. The Holy Spirit gives us the ability, gives us the strength to serve God in the Christian life. I'm just going to touch on this, I'm going to tap it very lightly and move on. Every point from last week and this week could and in some ways should be the subject of a multi-message series in and of itself. We're just tapping on things to remind us of what the Spirit does through his work in the life of believers.

In Philippians 2, if you would turn there with me, Philippians 2, this work of empowerment that the Holy Spirit does for us, remembering that it is the Spirit of God who is in us, who is working in us, the Apostle Paul tells the Philippian church, we're going to study this letter after this series is over eventually, Philippians 2:12, "So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure." Now, beloved, something that I just want to point out to you here is that as magnificent as the work of the Spirit of God is in our hearts, as magnificent as his ministry is to us, we need to understand that the holy nature of what he does in us is grounds for fear and trembling. That is why Paul says, work out your salvation with fear and trembling. I said at the beginning that we need to deal with these matters earnestly, we need to take them seriously, we need to not treat them lightly. Apparently what the work of the Spirit does has an impact on life that we are to respond to; that we are to build our lives in obedience to. Paul says, "Just as you have always obeyed, now obey in my absence and here's the obedience I'm looking for, work out your salvation with fear and trembling." The very nature of the august majestic salvation that God has given to us in Christ, oh it fills us with joy for sure, but we understand that there is a corresponding responsibility to let the work of the Spirit have its way in us to cooperate with that work of the Spirit in our sanctification and to follow in loving obedience to the work of the Spirit. That's critical to

what we're going to say later. So we don't treat this lightly. We don't treat it flippantly. We realize that this calls for our earnest response.

Now look at verse 13 with that said, looking at the work of the Spirit in the church today, "for it is God who is at work in you," it is God who is at work in you, "both to will and to work for His good pleasure." This is a wonderful truth. Yes, we need to work out our salvation, not in the sense that we're going to add to the work of Christ, not that we're going to earn it, not that we're going to lose it if we stumble in sin, but rather there is a recognition of responsibility that what God has given to me is meant to be lived out and to be growing into in life. God is at work in you and so this is a wonderful truth. This is an encouraging reality. As we seek to grow spiritually, as we worship individually and corporately on a Sunday morning, for example, as you grow in Christ, as you evangelize the lost, as you deal with adversity, as you study Scripture, you are not alone in that. The Holy Spirit is with you to provide a supernatural help, a supernatural empowerment, a supernatural enablement that lifts you beyond your natural abilities and helps you to grow in a way that you could not do if you were simply doing it in your own effort. This is the work and the ministry of the Holy Spirit in believers and among his body, the body of Christ. The indwelling Spirit carries us. The indwelling Spirit helps us, assists us in that process of sanctification, in that process of spiritual growth.

Jesus described the Spirit in this way in John 14:16. He said, "I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever; that is the Spirit of truth." Beloved, that's really precious. The Lord Jesus, the eternal Son of God, expressing in what he says here, he says, "I recognize that you're going to need help in the life that lies ahead. I've provided for you in advance. I've asked my Father to give you the Spirit and the Spirit will be to you as one who helps you. The Spirit will assist you. He will guide you and he will be with you forever." Once you have the Spirit, he doesn't leave. He may bring discipline into your life as you stray into disobedience and sin, but he's always having that sanctifying influence, he's always having that helping ministry in the life of true Christians and, therefore, we are not seeking our spiritual growth in our own power. It is God who is at work in you both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

S. Lewis Johnson, who is now with the Lord after many decades of great and fruitful and wonderful ministry, said this and I quote, he said, "The disposition to be obedient to the word of God is something the Holy Spirit gives us. So internally and irresistibly we are wrought upon by the Holy Spirit that we are led, guided, and enabled to do the work of God."

So we have this eternal Holy Spirit working in us to advance our progress in the Christian life. That's wonderful, isn't it? Isn't that an encouragement when you are struggling, when you stumble, to realize that the Spirit of God is given to you not as a referee, not as an umpire to judge you when you fall short to throw a flag on you, but rather to help you, to undergird you, to strengthen you in the midst of that. How great the love of the Father to give us a salvation like this, not only to take away our sins at the cross but to give us his own Spirit to help us live out the work that he first began in us. Blessed be his holy name.

So my friends, my brothers and sisters in Christ, when you are weak, when you are discouraged, when you have stumbled, you may ask for help from the Holy Spirit to empower you with the assurance, with the knowledge, with the expectation that God will gladly answer that prayer. I'm reminded of Matthew 7 which we studied several months ago, "Ask and it will be given to you. Seek and you will find. Knock and the door will be opened for you." This is in the context of the work, the ministry of the Holy Spirit. "God, I need the help of your Spirit to grow. I need the help of your Spirit to come out of this sin in which I've stumbled." So we have one upon whom we can call. It's not that you need more rules to help you be sanctified, it's that you have a Spirit that is willing, able and given to you for exactly that express purpose; to give you power that you lack that you might grow in a way that you otherwise would not. Blessed be his name.

How does he do that and what does the work look like? Well, let's go to a second point here this morning. There is a work of the Spirit that we could call his work of instruction. His work of instruction. You know, if you are a Christian and you've been a Christian for any length of time, you should be able to look back and say, "Do you know what? I understand things now that I didn't understand before. There are aspects of Christ and Christian living, there are aspects of the attributes of God and the work of Christ on the cross, I understand things today that I didn't understand some time ago." Well, why is that? How does that happen? Where does that growth and understanding come from? Well, the Spirit of God that is part of his ministry to believers, he guides us into all the truth by giving us the desire and the capacity to understand the word of God.

Truly, my friends, I'm just speaking very broadly here. I've said this many times, I should say it a lot more than what I do. One of the marks of a true Christian that is present in every true Christian without exception because it's the nature of the ministry of the Holy Spirit to do this, is to have some kind of a hunger and a desire for Scripture, to know it, to understand it, to read it, to want to be instructed in it, to learn from it because, and if you think about it, it could be no other way. If the Spirit of God delivered for us the word of God, which he did, and the Spirit of God comes to indwell true believers and to shape their desires by his work in their hearts, what's the outcome of that naturally and understandably and logically going to be? The Spirit of God is going to place in your heart desires for the things of God. Where are the things of God found? Where the Spirit of God revealed them, in what we hold in English as the 66 books of the Bible. So when you see someone who has an earnest desire for Scripture, a seemingly unquenchable thirst for Scripture, you're seeing the mark of someone who has truly been born again. When you see someone who that's just foreign to their life, it has nothing to do with what motivates them, what they care about at all, I'm speaking in absolute terms to allow some room for different measures of growth at different periods of time, but when you see an utter absence of that, there should be an immediate concern that that person has never been truly saved because the Spirit of God works in us to instruct us and to lead us into the word of God. He does that individually and when the Spirit of God is at work in a true church, he's doing that corporately in the life of a true church as well.

Let's look at a couple of Scriptures to see this. Look at 1 John 2 beginning in verse 20. 1 John 2:20 where the last living apostle said, "you have an anointing from the Holy One,

and you all know. I have not written to you because you do not know the truth, but because you do know it, and because no lie is of the truth." You see, the Holy Spirit abides within true believers. He indwells them. He continues with them. He remains with them and he has given us help and part of his ministry is so that you would know the truth and John says here, writing to true Christians, he says, "You have the Holy Spirit, you have this anointing from him and he has given you a knowledge and an understanding of the truth." So he can go on to say in verse 27, he says, "As for you, the anointing which you received from Him abides in you, and you have no need for anyone to teach you; but as His anointing teaches you about all things, and is true and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you abide in Him." The Spirit of God teaches true believers. The Spirit of God abides in them and he imparts truth to them. He opens their mind and communicates understanding. He conveys understanding to the mind and into the heart in a way that secures their understanding of the truth that he himself revealed.

Now as I've said in the past, the fact that John says you have no need for anyone to teach you doesn't mean that we're supposed to go off by ourselves and live the Christian life in isolation. It's not that. God has given pastors and teachers, Ephesians 4, to teach and instruct the church to build them up and to help them to grow in maturity, but what John is saying is you don't need special revelation from self-appointed prophets who don't truly know God, you don't need something outside of Scripture because you have already been given the Holy Spirit and as he communicates an understanding of the word, you have all the spiritual resources that you need. Think about it, again as I've said in the past, if John meant absolutely that they needed no teacher whatsoever, he wouldn't have written this letter to them. He wrote the letter to them to instruct them and so we understand that he's talking about we don't need outside sources of revelation to give us secret knowledge that we otherwise would lack. God graciously in Scripture, God graciously by the Spirit, has given us all that we need for life and godliness within the four corners of the 66 books of the Bible, and we stand on that and we stand only there and we reject everything else that claims to be revelation from God.

Look at 1 Corinthians 2 as we see this ministry of instruction that the Spirit gives to us. In verse 7 of 1 Corinthians 2, Paul says, "we speak God's wisdom in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God predestined before the ages to our glory; the wisdom which none of the rulers of this age has understood; for if they had understood it they would not have crucified the Lord of glory; but just as it is written," verse 9, this is so precious, "Things which eye has not seen and ear has not heard, and which have not entered the heart of man, all that God has prepared for those who love Him." God has a special gift that is reserved only for true Christians and it is called an understanding of his revelation. To be able to read the Bible with understanding, to be able to understand unseen things that are hidden from unsaved people, to understand eternal matters while you are living in a temporal life, is a great majestic gift from God that we take all too lightly, I'm afraid, but it is a gift from God.

Now, how are these things communicated to us? Is it because of our superior intellect? Is it because we tried harder? Because we were somehow more worthy? No. Verse 10, "For to us," to true believers, "God revealed them through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches all

things, even the depths of God. For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so the thoughts of God no one knows except the Spirit of God." The Spirit of God who alone knows the thoughts of God is the Spirit of God who indwells you as a Christian, the Spirit of God who was involved in your regeneration.

And what is his purpose for us now that we have received the Spirit? Verse 12, "Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God." We have received him. He is God's gift to us. And what does the Spirit of God do for us, what is part of his ministry to us, in what capacity does he deal with us? Look at the end of verse 12, "so that," for this purpose, "so that we may know the things freely given to us by God." The Holy Spirit, to use the technical word, the Holy Spirit illuminates us. He gives us light. He gives us understanding. He imparts the ability to grasp truth that God has revealed in his word. So if you are one of those that I described earlier, you have a hunger for the word of God, you can say, "I've been growing in the word of God over the course of time. God's word makes sense to me. God's word matters to me. God's word is important to me." Beloved, what you need to see is that is the evident mark of the work of the Holy Spirit in your life and you give thanks to him for that.

Now closely related to that, I almost kept it all within the same point but I'll mark it out as a separate third point for this morning. We saw his work of empowerment, the work of instruction, now we're going to look at the Spirit's work of filling. The of Spirit's work of filling and as I'm speaking here, I invite you to turn to the book of Ephesians 5. The work of filling. Christians are to be filled with the Holy Spirit as their pattern of life. You say, "What does that mean? What does that look like?" Well, let's take a moment to unpack this. It is the will of God for us, verse 17 of Ephesians 5, "So then do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is." What is that will? Paul describes it, he expands on what he's saying in verse 18, he says, "And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit." Don't be drunk with wine but be filled with the Spirit. These are parallel concepts that help us understand what Paul means by being filled with the Spirit. Just lightly saying it, what do we say about a man who is filled with alcohol? We say that he's under the influence, right? People are convicted multiple times each day, arrested multiple times each day for driving under the influence, under the influence of illegal drugs, under the influence of alcohol. Well, to be filled with the Spirit is a rather daring analogy that Paul makes, to be filled with the Spirit is to be under his influence. It's to be under his influence and you see the mark of that influence in verse 19 where it says, "speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord; always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father; and be subject to one another in the fear of Christ."

I have a couple of things to say about this. First of all, I want you to see that when Christians are filled with the Spirit, this is a really crucial observation for you to grasp because I said we're talking about the work of the Spirit in the context of the local church, the corporate work, the corporate mark of the work of the Spirit. Notice that being filled with the Spirit results in personal interactions within the body of Christ. Verse 19,

"speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks for all things. Verse 21, "and be subject to one another in the fear of Christ." So you see, beloved, this is a really crucial point that needs to shape and inform your thinking about involvement in the local church. A true Christian who is filled with the Spirit has a presence and an involvement in the local church. He has a presence and an involvement with the people of God because the Spirit of God who saved you, so you say, brings you into relationship when you're under his influence, brings you into relationship with other believers who he has also saved, who he is also working in. So you are drawn like a magnet when you are filled with the Spirit, you are drawn like a magnet to others who are similarly filled and you carry out a responsibility of love with them where you speak to them in edifying ways, you worship together in song with them, and you live in mutual submission, mutual care, mutual deference with one another, with one another, with one another. The idea of a Spirit-filled Christian existing in self-imposed isolation because he wants nothing to do with the church is a contradiction in terms. It is a non-entity. It is an oxymoron. Those who are truly saved by Christ love the other people that Christ has also saved and wants to give of himself, wants to give of herself, as an overflow of love and gratitude for the way that Christ has blessed them. Christ saved us to make us servants of his people in one way or another. Christ didn't come from heaven to earth and to give his life as a ransom for many, he didn't come to be served but to serve, he said. Well, the one who shares in his Spirit is going to have a similar like manner of service attitude directed toward the people of God somehow, somewhere. I won't try to quantify or define that for you but, beloved, it's there and it's unmistakable.

Those are the results of the influence of the Spirit of God but we are still left with, "Well, how does he exercise that influence?" Oh, and now it gets really sweet. Look over at a parallel passage in Colossians 3 and as we read in Colossians, we find this work of the Spirit, this relational aspect to the Christian life being laid out for us in Colossians 3:12 where the Bible says, "as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; bearing," here it is, "with one another, and forgiving," here it is, "each other, whoever has a complaint," here it is, "against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you. Beyond all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity." Beloved, how can anyone think that they're living the Christian life of love for one another when they reject association with other Christians? This is foolishness of primary magnitude. So we see the relational dynamic and we see what that relational dynamic is to be characterized by. What is it to be characterized by? Compassion. Kindness. Forgiveness. Love. Gentleness. Patience. Bearing with those who have offended you for the sake of the Christ who bore your offenses at the cost of his own blood at Calvary.

Now but what is the operating dynamic within the heart that shows the influence of the Spirit. Look at verse 16, Paul says, "Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you." Now this is interesting. In Ephesians 5 which he wrote at the same time as he wrote Colossians he says, "Be filled with the Spirit," and then there were these consequences of body life that flowed out of them. Here in Colossians 3 written at the same time, he says, "Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you," then he goes on to describe the identical effects

of the word of Christ that are described of the results of being filled with the Spirit. He says "with all wisdom," verse 16, "teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God, giving thanks through him to God the Father." Verse 18, "Wives, be subject to your husbands. Husbands, love your wives." It's the exact same structure that you find in Ephesians 5.

What does that tell us? Mark it carefully: to be filled with the Spirit is the same as letting the word of God dwell richly within you and we know that because the Spirit described results of the filling and the dwelling of the word are the same. The outcome is the same. So to be filled with the Spirit is to be believingly receptive to his instructing work through the word of God. To be filled with the Spirit is to have an eager desire to receive it, to receive God's word, to have it influence you, to have a disposition of obedience toward what the Spirit of God himself has given.

So let me ask you a question. Don't answer too quickly. Are you filled with the Spirit of God? Don't talk about your emotions in response to that question because people want to talk that way, "Oh, I'm so filled with the Spirit. I'm so happy. I'm so joyful and I'm just gushing with emotion." Well, emotion will trick you. Emotion is not the same thing as what we're talking about here. What is the disposition of your mind and heart toward the word of God, that's the question to mark whether you are filled with the Spirit or not. Ask yourself, to answer the question are you filled with the Spirit is to answer this question, beloved: do you love the word of God enough to receive it and to obey it? That is the mark of the Holy Spirit because just as the Son obeyed the Father in coming to earth, just as the Spirit gave the word of God through his out-breathing work upon the men who wrote it, so what that Spirit produces according to Scripture is a heart that is receptive to the word of God, that loves it, that has it in its affection, and seeks to obey it. Imperfectly, of course. If it required perfection, I would have to step down right now. We understand that our obedience is imperfect but the question is where is your heart affection, where is your disposition toward the word of God?

Since we're talking about corporate things, let me step back as the pastor here and say corporate things. I am very grateful to be among so many who love the word of God like you do. Some of you have relocated your entire lives simply in order to be a part of a ministry of the word and I'm grateful for those of you that have done that. Some of you undertake long commutes to be with us that other people think is crazy. Why would you drive that far? Why would you pass by so many other churches? Why not just go to one in your neighborhood? Well, you do it because you desire the word. This is why you come and it's a privilege for an unworthy servant like me to preach to such like-minded believers. It is. Others of you come without the support of your loved ones. You would be here with your family if only they would come but they don't, but you love the word of God, you love the fellowship of the saints enough to come, even though it means you come alone. Bless your heart. I say that soberly and earnestly, bless your heart for that. Why do I say that in this context of a message on the Holy Spirit today? Because the mark of the Spirit is that kind of love for the word of God. It manifests itself out in some kind of seeking out of the word of God and that should be a great encouragement to you if that's you, that you are willing to get up early, that you're willing to drive a long way to

be here with us. Look, all we do here is we sing and teach. You know, there's not a dog and pony show to attract anyone. That's by design. We do that for a reason. We do it so that people would come for the sake of the word.

Now, admittedly we have a few who seem to take the word of God and leave it as it suits their personal convenience. Okay, whatever. Yet the prevailing spirit, I believe in this body in this church as I look out on these faces, shows the work of the Holy Spirit because there is an evident desire in your corporate heart for the word of God, and for that we give thanks to God. We take no glory to ourselves. We ascribe no ability to the primary speaker. We look at that, we look around and we see like-minded believers and we say this is a mark of the work of the Spirit of God. Praise God for that. But in the midst of this fallen, wicked, decrepit world, there are people who have supernatural affections for godly things and it shows by the way that they shape and arrange their lives. Praise be to God.

Now there's a fourth and final aspect to the work of the Spirit which I'm calling the work of unity. The work of unity. You know, back in March of last year, 2017, I preached a message titled "Putting the U in Church Unity." You might look for that message if you're new to our church because this is just a very brief thumbnail of it. Beloved, open your heart to the word of God in what I'm about to say because what I'm about to say is really really important, really really critical, easily overlooked, easily diminished, easily pushed aside because it's inconvenient and it's uncomfortable at times. When the Holy Spirit is truly at work in a church, you see unity in the body. You see unity in the body. You see harmony in relationships. You see a mutuality of love that is the mark of the work of the Spirit of God.

Look at Ephesians 4 with me. Paul after three great chapters describing the greatness of salvation in Christ, he goes into prayer. Oh, this is so sweet. Pull up a chair and get comfortable. Oh, you are sitting down, good. After saying all these things, Paul turns to prayer in Ephesians 3:14 and he says, "For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name, that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man," this is all of what we've been talking about, "so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; and that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints," there is this corporate dimension to it again, "what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God." Paul says, "Having taught you about salvation in these prior three chapters, I'm now praying that the Spirit of God would strengthen you to understand it and to dwell and to live in the midst of the reality of it, in the overflow of the reality of these truths." That is an apostolic prayer for the church that, "This is the way it is to be and this I seek the blessing of God upon you for. I asked God to do this work," Paul says..

Well, after he has prayed this magnificent prayer, what does he talk about? What is the overflow of it? What are the commands that come from the intercession? Chapter 4, verse 1, "Therefore," in light of what I've said in these prior three chapters, in light of my more

immediate prayer that you would be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner man, here's where that leads to; put all of these things on the table, this is the overflow, this is what comes out of it, Paul says, "Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called." Okay, what would that look like, Paul? "With all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love." Do you see it again? One another, corporate dimension, mutual relationships within the body of Christ, do you see it? You cannot separate these two. You cannot separate salvation and say that, "I have salvation," let me put it this way, to say you have salvation has implications that lead you into the body of Christ and into the "one anothers" with certain attitudes, heart attitudes, heart dispositions toward those in the body of Christ. "With all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love." What do you want from us, Paul? What do you want from us, God? This is your word, this is your church, this is your salvation, what is it that you want? What's foremost in the application? Verse 3, "being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." Unity. Harmony. Free, open, transparent, caring relationships with one another. When the Holy Spirit is at work, you see that kind of unity being manifested.

Look at Philippians 2:1, and we'll work to apply this in a moment. Philippians 2:1, "Therefore if there is any encouragement in Christ, if there is any consolation of love, if there is any fellowship of the Spirit," if you share in the Spirit together, "if any affection and compassion, make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose. Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another," there it is again, "regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others." This corporate effect of the work and presence of the Spirit shows itself in unity, shows itself in harmony, shows itself in loving relationships. As we saw earlier, the filling of the Spirit has a corporate effect that we need to understand, that we need to respect, that we need to advance and develop.

That's the positive side. You can see this in a negative way also. Look at Ephesians 4:30. You can turn back there with me. Ephesians 4:30 says, "Do not," here's the negative side of it, "Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption." Don't grieve him. He's a person. He's not just some impersonal force, he's a person who can be grieved.

Well, how is it that we would grieve him, then? What is it that would sadden the Spirit of God, so to speak, speaking in anthropopathic terms? Verse 31, "Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice." Wow. Wow. When we talk about sin, generally speaking, for many outside the walls of this church and perhaps even within it, you know, you go to areas of sexuality or abortion or things like that and there is plenty of room for sin there, but what you need to see is that when Paul spoke of the greatness of salvation, his exhortation was to unity. When Paul said, "Don't grieve the Spirit of God," his exhortation was against the things that would disrupt unity, that would bring poison into relationships: bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, slander. "Put it all away," he says, "along with all malice."

Then he ends with the contrary, the positive side and he says in opposition to that, so that you will not grieve the Spirit, "Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you." The unity of which Paul speaks is a unity that is rooted in the love of Christ, in the example of Christ where he gave himself up; where he gladly forgave you of all of your greater sins against him, now he says, "You live out by showing forgiveness, love, kindness and compassion to those within the body who have somehow bothered you, even sinned against you. Forgive them. You sinned against God and God forgave you, don't you see the inevitable spiritual force that says therefore if you've been forgiven as a person, you become a person of forgiveness, of kindness, of tenderheartedness? Don't grieve the Spirit by being something else other than that."

Now, I have some really important things to say now, really really important. I'm prepared for people to react against what I'm about to say but if I would withhold what I believe needs to be said simply because I don't want an adverse reaction, I wouldn't be much of a pastor, would I? I'm not much of a pastor as it is. There was a dear woman that I knew in my prior ministry. I'm not sure if she's still on earth or if she's gone to heaven. Her name was Frances, the grandmotherly type, a woman of deep profound love that she generously showed especially to the children that would gather around her in her teaching. She was simple in a lot of ways. She couldn't have explained a whole lot about theology to you, although she could have held her own. But she was simple. Her life had been simple. She was not a woman of means but she was greatly full of the love of Christ. If I could have 20 of Frances in this church, I'd pay the air tickets to have her here, have them all here, all 20 of them. That would be great. When she was convicted by something that I said in my preaching, she would often come to me and with a twinkle in her eyes, she would tell me, "Don, you're meddling. You're meddling," by which she meant to say, "What you said was convicting to me. It made me a little bit uncomfortable but I realize that I need to respond to the word of God." Of course, I never was targeting her in anything that I said. You don't do that from a pulpit. You don't target people like that. But as the Spirit of God applies the word of God in the hearts of the people of God through the preaching of the word of God, conviction results and she said, "You are meddling," and she said it as a word of affirmation, not as a word of opposition.

Beloved, I'm going to meddle today. I am going to meddle with your lives and I need to do this for the sake of Christ, for your own sake, and for the sake of our church. Beloved, it is easy to associate with a ministry of the word of God. That's easy. It's easy to come in and go out and just kind of loosely stay on the margins of a ministry, maybe engage in conversation, maybe you don't before you go, and to have a sense of security, superficial security in your mind that, "I'm going to a Bible teaching church, I must be okay. I must be okay. After all, why would I be at a Bible teaching church if something else was active in my heart?" It's easy to associate with a ministry of the word that way. Beloved, I have to tell you it is a different matter altogether to live by the Holy Spirit. You see, the work of the Holy Spirit is not simply measured by the acquisition of Bible knowledge. The work of the Holy Spirit as we have seen repeatedly from God's word directly here this

morning, the work of the Holy Spirit shows up preeminently in the nature of our relationships within the body of Christ.

Like I say, I wouldn't be much of a pastor if I didn't tell you what I see. I wouldn't be much of a pastor if I couldn't be forthright with you at a time like this. Many of you, many of you need to examine yourselves in light of the things that we've seen from God's word today. Many of you need to examine yourself in light of the emphasis that the Holy Spirit puts on the unity of the body. Not all of you but many of you, enough that I am making a point of this on a Sunday morning because it's obvious that you have not yet put away all bitterness, malice, wrath and slander. It's obvious. I hear things that you say to me. I watch your interactions. I watch you walk by people that you are close to without even making eye contact with them, and I know that there are reasons why you are doing that. The silent treatment that some give to family members who share membership in the church with each other, the silent treatment is inconsistent with your claim to know the Holy Spirit and to be under his influence. The way that some of you withdraw from others when you are offended is a grief to the Holy Spirit. This is not what the Spirit does. This is not the work of the Holy Spirit to have that kind of isolation within families, to have that kind of critical spirit toward others in the body of Christ. If I can use a term that I don't entirely like, but this passive aggressive approach to marriage and family relationships and relationships within the body, that is not consistent with, is it, what Scripture describes as the fruit of the Spirit, as the overflow of being filled with the Spirit of God: kindness, tenderheartedness, forgiveness that marks those who have truly been forgiven by God.

Fathers, sons, mothers, daughters, brothers, sisters, husbands, wives, friends, acquaintances, I ask you: where is the unity of the Spirit reflected in those fractured and broken relationships that you're unwilling to mend? Where is the mark of the work of the Spirit of God in your life when you not only tolerate that, you cultivate the bitterness in your heart and you perpetuate it? Tell me where the Spirit of God is to be found in that kind of dynamic in your closest relationships. It is of no value to serve in the church if you are estranged from your family, especially if you share church membership with them. That is not right. Something is deeply deeply flawed in those times. The question is, I don't want to overstate it. I'm not given, I don't think, to being overly dramatic. I really think this is a turning point for our church in terms of how we respond to these things because the question is what kind of Christians are we going to be? Are we going to be content to associate with a ministry of the word, are we going to be content to have that kind of outward association and go through motions while thoroughly being satisfied and content with the hypocrisy of alienation with relationships with those that we meet together for worship? Those things are not consistent with one another.

Now the fact that this can happen among true Christians, I believe, is reflected in the fact that Paul had to say in Ephesians 4, "Don't grieve that Spirit. Don't do this." He commands them to put it away because it was present there in the church of Ephesus and so we're not questioning anyone's salvation directly here with what we say, but I think the question that's before us is whether we will go through the motions of external hypocrisy or whether we will genuinely seek the unity of the Spirit with one another; whether we

will respond to the word of God that is so clear on these matters before us. I wouldn't say this if it was only one. I wouldn't say it if it was two. I wouldn't say it if it was three. I say it because I see a trend that I'm not willing to let go, that I'm not willing to address in the natural course and flow of the preaching of God's word. I told you that I've been preparing this series for months so I didn't come with an agenda to teach on these things here today.

Beloved, we need to humble ourselves. To the extent that you have participated and contributed to something like that, you need to ask God to forgive you and ask the Spirit of God who is the Spirit of unity to help you. Take a first step of some kind. Be the one willing to initiate the fact, you know, "I'm sorry," rather than nursing, "I'm sorry. Please forgive me," and to let that be the start of sowing toward this greater work of the Spirit. If we've received the Spirit, we should walk by the Spirit. If we are walking by the Spirit, it's going to show up in increasing unity, not in satisfaction with fractured relationships. It's going to show in the same kind, forgiving way that Christ dealt with us at the cross. "I'll take the blame. I'll let it go. You don't even need to say anything. My heart and love is back with you again." Beloved, there you go. Bitterness, let all bitterness and wrath be put away. Be kind, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ has forgiven you.

Let's pray together.

Our Father, we thank you for the work of the Holy Spirit. We do indeed ask you to forgive us of those times where we have grieved him with the way that we've approached relationships within the body of Christ. Help us, God. Let today be a turning point in a number of marriages, a number of family relationships between different generations, immediate family, extended family. God, O God, God, we would not want this church to be a church of only external appearance. We ask for the reality that comes from your Spirit and I pray for each one to be strengthened and helped in the things that we have discussed today. Let your word have full reign in our hearts, we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

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