

Twenty Aspects of the Pattern of the Church Life in the Book of Acts

(Fellowship from Minoru Chen on November 1, 2020)

Prayer

Lord, we commit this time to You. Week by week, thank You for granting us this opportunity to fellowship, not concerning our need but concerning Your interest, Your interest on the earth and Your interest in America. We pray for the recovery. We pray for all the local churches. We pray for Your move in these ten cities. We pray for the serving brothers. We pray for Your mercy and Your grace. Lord, we pray Your blessing and Your leading. Lord, above all, we pray for the Spirit to fill us within and without, so that in these days we will rise up as one man, go to Jerusalem and build Your house. Lord, strengthen us. Lord, embolden us. Empower us. Lord, give us the faith that we need. Lord, we give You this time, the utterances and the words. Bring forth Your burden. Lord, we reject anything from our human mind. Lord, we open to Your Spirit's anointing. Oh Lord, anoint us. Speak to us. Cause us to go forward. Illuminate us. Sanctify us. Send the Spirit of God. Lord, be with us today.

Introductory Word

This ongoing fellowship on Lord's Days I treasure very much. I think these times are crucial. They are strategic. They are very necessary for our going on in these days. As I mentioned to you, I wish all the churches, not just these ten, would receive this kind of a fellowship. Because, in this country, the local churches are now at a pivotal point, at a turning point, even on the threshold of a new advance of the Lord. I do not use those big words just to throw big words around. I myself am deeply convicted, and I have consecrated myself, I will dedicate myself – I hope you all will do the same – to have a fresh consecration to the Lord for this. Every time the Lord wants to move, His people

need to make a new vow, to give a new consecration for a new beginning, for a fresh going on or advance of the Lord. For the sake of our cooperation with Him, I think in these days, it is good for us, brothers, to take what we're talking about here seriously by giving ourselves to the Lord. Otherwise, these will just be words, you know, water off a duck's back, and it will pass away. No, that cannot happen. Brothers, I am very strong in this matter. We need a change. We need a revival. We need a renewal. We need a fresh advance in the Lord's recovery in this country. I like this word: If it's not us, then who? If it's not now, then when? Brothers, those are the questions we should ask.

This morning I had an hour-long meeting with the churches in Pennsylvania. Not only Pennsylvania, but a few saints from the neighboring state of West Virginia, Morgantown also joined. I was very delighted to see many saints. A few of us on this call today were there with us. The word came to me this morning for that meeting. However, after I spoke, I became very burdened that, today, I need to re-speak that word to all of us. And I have some addition to that word.

Now what did I speak on, and what am I going to talk to you about today. We're talking about a new church life, am I right? We're talking about the God-ordained way church life, am I right? We're talking about a Scripture-revealed way for us to meet, to serve, and to build up the local churches. This is all our burden in the recovery. So what I want to do today is to use the book of Acts, not the entire book but just the very first part of this book, to give you all brothers a picture. I underline this word *picture*. I mean a painting, a pattern, and I may even use the word *model*, of what a New Testament church life can look like or should look like.

The Commission of the Resurrected and Ascended Christ:
To Build His Church

I am of course referring to the first church that ever existed on the earth and that would be the church in Jerusalem. We all know that church was born straight out of – it is the first birth of a local church after – the Lord's ascension. Ten days of prayer in one accord in that upper room in Jerusalem resulted in the outpouring or the descending of the Spirit of the glorified Jesus – the One who was not only resurrected, the Savior Jesus Christ, but the One who ascended physically to the heavens and even to be enthroned on God's throne

to be made Head and Leader, Christ the Anointed One, the Administrator of this entire universe, and for sure of this earth. All authority has been given to Him in heaven and on earth. And chief among His work, the work of this Anointed One, His commission, is to build up His church.

Matthew 16 is the prophecy of all prophecies, spoken by the Lord Jesus Himself: "I will build My church." That is what the resurrected and ascended Christ has been doing in these last 2,000 years. On the one hand, He is on the throne, administrating everything, the universe, arranging and working out the whole world situation. On the other hand, He is also there interceding on our behalf, at the right hand of God; also working as the great High Priest, standing before the Lord, before God, to serve Him in the order of Melchizedek, which means not only to serve God, but also to minister to us, His believers, with Himself as the bread and the wine; and also, He is the Chief Shepherd, the great shepherd of the sheep, to shepherd all of us, by means of all things in our environment and by means especially of Himself indwelling us, living in us, working in us, moving within us, shepherding us, all the days of our lives, and that shepherding will work out the full organic salvation of God in all of us believers. These are the statuses of this resurrected and ascended Christ. We know these are facts revealed in the Bible. But all of these are for one thing: to build up His church, His Body, which Body will eventually be the one new man. That one new man will also become the bride of Christ and the warrior of God: on the one hand to satisfy Christ, the Lord, to be the wife of the Lamb of God, on the other hand to be that warrior, that fighter, that corporate army to defeat God's enemy, Christ's enemy, the Antichrist and even Satan himself. And that will bring in the kingdom age.

Brothers, this is it in just a few short sentences. I just laid out for you the very purpose of God and the very commission of Christ that today He is still fulfilling. Christ's fulfillment of His own prophecy to build up the church is not to be done by Himself, the individual Christ alone. That would not be according to the principle of incarnation. In fact, according to the revelation that Paul the apostle received, that prophecy is to be fulfilled in part by us, the co-builders with Christ and the co-workers of God. Did Paul not say to take heed how we build, we are God's farm, we are God's building. We are all co-workers

together with God. All that should make it very clear to us that today, men, saved ones, believers are to join Christ, to be one with Christ, and in that oneness, would share in this building work. So today, not only Christ is building, but we are building with Him. In Ephesians 4, the Body builds itself up in love. Eventually it requires every member of the Body, every operative part of the Body, every joint of the supply of the Body, to work together, in coordination, to build up His Body. So Christ would not directly do the building work, but rather He would build up the church through you, through me, and through all the saints. Every saint is needed in this building. Every saint is a builder. We are not just the stones; we are the builders of those stones.

The Outpouring of the Spirit Producing the Church, the Body of Christ

After this, Christ ascended physically to the heavens, seen by many hundreds – ten days hence. According to Old Testament prophets, Joel and others prophesied, “I will pour out My Spirit upon all flesh... old men shall dream dreams; young men shall see visions. ... In those days... everyone who calls on the name of Jehovah shall be saved.” (Joel 2:28, 32a) The Spirit was poured forth on that day. The Spirit of the glorified Jesus. The Spirit, not only of God, but of Christ, of Jesus, of Jesus Christ. This Spirit was poured forth. The Spirit with the elements and essence that never existed like that. It incorporated incarnation, human living, crucifixion, resurrection, ascension – all that Christ has accomplished, attained, and obtained are in that Spirit. That Spirit descended and was poured forth.

Out of that, the church of God, the Body of Christ, was formed on the earth – a community and entity that never ever existed before, a mingling of God with man, a mingling of divinity and humanity, God manifested in the flesh for the first time, this time not individually in one man Jesus but in thousands, on the first day 3,000, a few days later 5,000 more, and eventually, millions and millions. When the Spirit was poured out in that way, that poured-out Spirit was the work of the mingling of the Triune God with the tripartite man, filling man with the pneumatic Christ, with this processed and consummated Triune God. Man was mingled with God and the outcome was the church, the Body of Christ. This Body is not only mystical, which it is. It is not only mysterious, which it is. This Body is also practical, practically expressed among men, seen by men. If it's not seen by

men, that is not very expressive. And so there must not just be a heavenly church or Body, but there must be local churches in space and in time, because that's where human beings exist.

The first church 2,000 years ago, because this Pentecost took place in Jerusalem, was the church in Jerusalem, the first local church. 2,000 years later, today, we still have local churches, and praise the Lord, there is a church in Jerusalem in the Lord's recovery. So, we're in these churches, these local churches, today. What should that practical expression look like? If you ask me, the best thing is to go back to the word of God.

Let's start with that first church, Jerusalem, the church that was in Jerusalem, a large church, mostly composed of Jews. There were a few proselytes there, who were Gentiles who converted to Judaism. These Jews have gathered by God's sovereignty to Jerusalem to keep the feast. I counted at least 15 or 16 places mentioned among those who heard Peter preach. And there they were, they shared the same Jewish ancestry but their ethnicities – their background, their culture, their language for sure, their dialects – were very different. Some were from Babylon, from Mesopotamia, some from Egypt. I think the skin color might also have been quite different among these Jews, like today. We have Jews in Ethiopia, don't we? Some were from Asia, meaning Asia Minor. Some were from Syria. Some were even from the islands of Cyprus. I think Barnabas was born there, if I'm correct. And of course, some were from nearby provinces of the Roman Empire. All these gathered there and, miraculously, they all understood that Galilean speaking. They said, how come we all understood? Well, that was a miracle. And so that gospel was preached to all the ethnicities in that day. The first church actually was a church of Jews only.

It was only in chapter 10 of Acts, when there was another outpouring of the Spirit upon the Gentiles, Romans, at Cornelius's house with his friends, neighbors, and relatives, that the Gentile part of the Body was baptized into the same one Spirit, into one Body. And there, that Body of the Lord was formed, comprised of these two parts. This is all spoken by Paul in chapter two of Ephesians. On the cross, He abolished the ordinances, He broke down the middle wall, He brought the two together, Jews and Gentiles, and in one Body, they have access in one Spirit to the Father. The Lord came and preached peace

in that way and accomplished that wonderful fact on the cross. He created the new man there. But practically, that fact was experienced in Jerusalem and in the house of Cornelius. Jews and Gentiles were both baptized in one Spirit into one Body. Now the Body of Christ was formed.

Twenty Points on the Pattern of the First Church

I want to concentrate today just on that first church, to see what a church life looked like from the outset, from the get go. Why do we want to study this? Because apparently, they didn't have any manual. They didn't have any books. They didn't have any instructions to follow on how to practice the church life. I don't think so. All they had was the teaching of Jesus passed on to these disciples and the Lord's followers. But what came out was something very interesting, very special, and I would say very peculiar, because nothing of the sort had ever existed. They didn't even have the term *church life*. It was just an instant, spontaneous, natural gathering of these believers, 3,000 to start with and then more joined or were added later on. Spontaneously, they lived together in a communal way, in a collective way, in a way that no one designed. No one told them to do this or that, but spontaneously they did. You have to believe, because of that, that it must be the Spirit bubbling over in them. They were filled with the Spirit, the freshness of their salvation, within and without, and out came something called the church life.

And so today, I have 20 points. You may say, Whoa, you're going to bury us with 20 points. Now don't worry about that. These 20 points are very delightful. We should actually know these 20 points. But I want to put together and frame a picture, a painting, for you. As they say, a picture is better than a thousand words. Now, let me say this first. This is not meant, what I pass on to you, to be a book of instruction, do this and do that, or to follow the first church in Jerusalem legally. Please don't do that. I am giving you a pattern, a picture, a model. Don't try to replicate this legally, this is not my burden. I want to present this to you, brothers, so that you can, through this picture, have a window to look into the spirit, the atmosphere, the condition, the living, the service of those believers in their church life there.

By the way, before I get into that, let me give you an assignment,

which I also gave to the saints this morning. Get that book with one chapter called *A Genuine Church*. That book, that one chapter, was given in 1990 to the church in Long Beach after a great turmoil. Brother Lee was visiting various churches in Southern California to minister life, to bring in the healing, to stabilize the churches, and to help and shepherd the saints. He went to Long Beach and gave this message. That book is a classic. It covers the first nine verses of 1 Corinthians chapter one. In it, marvelously, profoundly, our brother disclosed what the church, a genuine church, is. What is its nature? What is its essence? What is its possession? What is its ground? What is its fellowship? What is its expression? He did not get into practical details, but presented all these fundamental, basic aspects of a real local church. Now, mind you, Brother Lee used the words *genuine church*. You may not think that the church in Corinth was a genuine church. To me, it's less than genuine. It was a terrible church. Am I right? Because even right after the nine verses, Paul immediately said, I heard from one of your households that divisions are among you. Eventually not just divisions, but 9 or 10 problems, some of the grossest kinds. I wouldn't consider Corinth a genuine church, but, brothers, Brother Lee called it a genuine church, despite its condition. He lifted us up to see the reality of the church. This book is simply marvelous. So I want to give that assignment to you. I even suggest to the 10 churches, you may want to take a week, stop or suspend your current morning revival and take this book, break it down into seven days for the saints, a verse a day, nine verses. After a week, you will help the saints to see the basic things, not deep diving, not in detail, but you will have this broad view about what a genuine local church is. I really strongly encourage you to do this. Not only your church, but those who are migrating to your church, even those who are thinking of migrating to your church, help them to get into this. So we will all review these things. These things may not be new, but that utterance is very fresh. This will help all of us to have a common view, a common vision, concerning the church life, the church. I wouldn't say the church life here, I say the church, a local church.

Now, this afternoon I want to talk about a pattern of the early church. Being a pattern, it is for us to imitate, for us to follow, though not legally, because we need to follow the Spirit above all else. I want to read four portions of the word in Acts, all in those first five chapters. You should be familiar with these verses. Nevertheless, I still want to

read them. The references are as follows: 2:42-47, 4:32, 5:12-14, 42. Those are the scriptures, and let me read to you.

“And they continued steadfastly in the teaching and the fellowship of the apostles, in the breaking of bread and the prayers. And fear was upon every soul; and many wonders and signs took place through the apostles. And all those who believed were together and had all things common; And they sold their properties and possessions and divided them to all, as anyone had need. And day by day, continuing steadfastly with one accord in the temple and breaking bread from house to house, they partook of their food with exultation and simplicity of heart, Praising God and having grace with all the people. And the Lord added together day by day those who were being saved.”
(2:42-47)

In these six verses, brothers, I hope you catch the picture, you see an atmosphere, you enter into a kind of condition of a group of people who were just saved and now beginning to live a new life, a new communal life, together as the assembly of God or the church of God. Now, let's read 4:32. This is the continuation of that church life in Jerusalem that began after the day of Pentecost.

“And the heart and soul of the multitude of those who had believed was one; and not even one said that any of his possessions was his own, but all things were common to them.”

5:12-14: *“And through the hands of the apostles many signs and wonders took place among the people; and they were all with one accord in the portico of Solomon. And none of the rest dared to join themselves to them, but the people magnified them. And believers were all the more being added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women.”*

Now, finally, 5:42: *“And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they did not cease teaching and announcing the gospel of Jesus as the Christ.”*

Later on, after this, there was the appointment of deacons to serve the tables and other things that were added to the church life. But I want to just give you this first picture, this first pictorial graph, of this

early church. Now I have 20 points, and I grouped them in altogether five groups of four. I'm not going to spend time to get into them, because many of us should know these things and you can study these things at another time because of our time constraint today.

First Group of Four Points:
The Spirit, the Word, Repentance, Baptism

The first four points I want to tell you, actually, is what gave rise to such a church life, what initiated this church life, the elements that were present, without which there would be no such church life. These were the necessary elements to that church life. These four things you can see from chapter one through chapter two. Number one, the Spirit. This goes without saying. The pouring out of the Spirit, both essentially and economically. The Spirit – the processed and consummated Triune God reaching man finally as the Spirit. That Spirit was poured out for the formation of Christ's Body. And of course, this same Spirit would convict men, those Jews, and eventually regenerate them to be believers. This is the same Spirit that filled the apostles within and without, that gave them the power to speak the word. So, the Spirit. There's nothing without the Spirit. Brothers, please note: there would be no church life without the Spirit. I don't care what manual you have, what instructions you have. No Spirit – no church. The main thing we need in the Body is the Spirit. The Spirit and the Body are one.

The second thing, element, is the word. Imagine that Peter did not preach, Peter did not speak the word, Peter did not quote Joel, the prophets. Those people would not know what to believe. The word is necessary because the word is the carrier of the Spirit. The word and the Spirit are one. The Spirit needs the word to convey Himself to man. You need the hearing of faith to receive the Spirit. This is in Galatians; you hear the word, but you receive the Spirit. So the word from the outset is necessary. No word, I would say, brothers, no church. The Spirit and the word are essential to the forming of the church life. We will never depart these two things. Never.

Now there are two things on man's side. These two things that I just gave are on God's side, God's gift: the gift of the Spirit and the gift of His word. On man's side, what happened to these Jews when they listened, when they were convicted? Number one, repentance. They

asked, what shall we do? Men and brethren, what shall we do? What was the word from Peter? Repent, all of you. Repent, not just from your sins, but even repent, turn away, from your religion, your old-time Jewish religion. Turn. Repent. You may not think repentance is so important, brothers. Let me tell you that repentance is very important. It's not just a one-time thing to repent to the Lord. We actually need a constant repentance and confession to continually receive the Spirit. It's a big part of our Christian life, and even of our church life. Repentance and confession is the way we empty out for the Spirit to come in to fill.

The second part that men must do is to be baptized. They were baptized – a very important thing – into the name of Christ Jesus for their forgiveness of sins, for them to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. Now, of course, we're not just talking about that water baptism. We're talking about that mystical union between man and God: baptism into the name of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit, the baptism that will cause union. Repentance and confession is the work of the cross, through the death of Christ, our oneness and identification with the cross. The baptism of the Spirit is on the positive side, for us to receive the Spirit, for us to drink of the Spirit, for us to be filled and enjoy the Spirit with its bountiful supply. So this is the baptism that they went through, and they even received the gift of the Spirit, each one of them, for the building up of the church. So these are the first group of four.

**Second Group: The Teaching of the Apostles,
the Fellowship of the Apostles, the Breaking of Bread, Prayer**

The second group are these four things. These are critical things to have this genuine normal church life. Number one, the teaching of the apostles. For us to build up the local church, to have the church life, we can entertain only one kind of teaching, not different teachings, only the teaching of the apostles, which came to them through Peter and the eleven that stood with him. He was giving them the teaching of the apostles. As John the apostle wrote in the Epistle of 1 John, the message came from us, the apostles, who have touched the word of life, who have seen and touched with our hands, we pass on to you, we communicate with you, that you may have fellowship with us. It is the teaching of the apostles, the message of the apostles, and of course, today, that teaching is the whole New Testament. Our church

life is based on that teaching. A strong and normal local church must stay, continue steadfastly, in this teaching. That's why we follow this ministry in the Lord's recovery which brings to us not different teachings, but this one unique teaching, the apostles' teaching of God's economy.

Following this is the fellowship of the apostles. By means of this teaching, we are brought into a certain fellowship, into a certain common participation or enjoyment of Christ, of God. That fellowship is the fellowship of the apostles, which is also the fellowship of the Spirit, of the Holy Spirit, in 2 Corinthians 13:14. It is also the fellowship of the Body of Christ. One fellowship. One circulation of blood. Every local church, to be a genuine proper church, must remain in this fellowship. Listen, this fellowship is not localized. There's no Charlotte fellowship. There's no Pittsburgh fellowship. There's no Memphis fellowship. There is only one fellowship in this whole universe and we are all in that fellowship. Brothers, that's why we need to blend, because we are one Body, enjoying the same one Spirit. So remain in this fellowship. Never leave this fellowship. Never isolate your church. Never proclaim autonomy. Autonomy means isolation, cutting off a member from the Body. That means not only division, but death. Stay in the fellowship of the Body of Christ, the apostles' fellowship.

Number three – an important thing – is the breaking of bread. The breaking of bread. There's nothing more important in our Christian church practice than to remember the Lord. *"This do in remembrance of Me."* The Lord wants us to remember Him above all else. That is why before He died, He broke bread with the disciples and said, Do this until I drink with you afresh in the Father's kingdom, this fruit of the vine. Later on, Paul said to display His death until He comes. We are to do this from the time of the Lord's ascension to the Lord's coming back, as His church, to remember Him. So we must break bread, not as a ritual, not as a so-called holy communion, but out of our love and gratitude towards the Lord for His great redemption and salvation. We are to remember Him, thank Him for His broken body and His shed blood, without which we are doomed. Brothers, of course there are lot of things here. I know we all break bread, but, brothers, let us have a fresh appreciation of bread breaking. It is not a meeting, I tell people, don't go to the Lord's table meeting. That is not a meeting. That is a table. That is a meal. That is a supper. That is a

dinner. Go *eat*, don't go *meet*. I would like to change that culture among us, that speaking. Where are you going? I'm going to eat the dinner of the Lord, I'm going to the Lord's supper, not a meeting. Remember Him. Oh, you have to tell the saints that this is the most important thing in the church life as far as our gatherings – none can compare to remembering Him. I feel I need to even give some brief training again on the Lord's table for the saints. It has become a form, losing its reality and meaning. In the early days, in the early church, they broke bread every day, not every week. That came later. They were just dynamically saved. They were so enthusiastic with their salvation. They just loved the Lord. They wanted to remember Him every day. It was not a meeting or a form. I wish that will happen to us. So if today some saints want to break bread every day, don't stop them. But that cannot be something legal. That should not become a form. That should come from our heart.

Number four, prayers. These days, brothers, we are emphasizing the prayer of the church. I hope the saints are affected to build up their prayer life. I hope the churches have a goal to build up the ministry of prayer in the church. There is no greater ministry than prayer. Prayer, next to the breaking of bread, is the most important thing in the church. But here it also does not say *prayer meeting*. It just says *the prayers*. All kinds of prayers. Not just Tuesday night. No, every day. Unceasingly pray. If we want our church to be strong and vital, it must be permeated with prayer. Brother Lee said, There's no church like the church in Los Angeles. That gave him such memory, such pride I would even say. In his whole ministry life, he said there was not another church so filled with prayer. And I can testify to that. I was there for a few years. It was like that. The prayer was strong. It was the most outstanding feature of the church life – its prayer. But today, sorry to say, the praying spirit is not that strong. So the church is not so living. I still want to suggest beseeching.org if you have not signed up. This week, leading to next week's election, we have been praying for that election. We didn't use that word, but for those in power, for those that God has appointed for the sake of this nation, for the sake of our church life, and for the sake of the salvation of all men, according to the desire of the Savior God, we need to pray. And every day of this week is to pray for this. Next week we'll pray for something else. Then we will continue. Brothers, build up this prayer. Become a man of prayer.

Third Group: Continuing Steadfastly, With One Accord, Having the Fear of God, Having All Things in Common

I come to the third group. The third group is the attitude of these saints when they practiced that first church life. Their condition – maybe this is a better word – their heart, their spirit bringing forth a certain kind of atmosphere. What are those four things? Number one, they continued steadfastly. These words keep coming back again and again in the book of Acts, especially in the description of the church labor. Continued steadfastly. They did not take breaks. They did not take vacations. Brothers, the church life must continue steadfastly. The environment may change, we may go up and down. But the church life is steadfast in its continuation, solid, with perseverance, with endurance. Some have to take the lead in this way. You don't just jump in and jump out, show up for a few meetings and don't show up for a few. That's not the way to practice the church life.

Number two – I love this one – with one accord. The verses that we read say they were together as one. I tell you, this matter of one accord actually started in the ten days of prayer in the upper room. With one accord, men and women, they prayed, 120 of them. And that brought in the Pentecost. There is nothing more important in a good church than oneness: the oneness of the brothers, the oneness amongst the saints, the one accord, meaning one spirit, one soul, one heart. This oneness, as we all know, is the key to all the spiritual and divine blessings. It's not your gift. It's not my ability. It's our oneness that brings in the blessing. A church may be short of some gifted or powerful speaking brothers, but that church is one. I tell you, that oneness is almost something you can touch, you can feel. So, brothers, get rid of all the diverse mindedness among us. Get rid of all the opinions and preferences among us. Endeavor to keep the oneness of the Spirit. Be one with the brothers. Be one with the saints. Let the self go. Let the divisive self go. Just be one with the saints. When there is a church, whether it's 12 people or 1,200 people, that is one like that, oh, I tell you, the Spirit will come, the blessing will flow. So we need to be blended together. We need to love one another. We need to take the cross. And we need to be in the spirit because that's the way we're blended together. And the more we blend this way, the more one we become. This includes even with our spouses. Don't forget to be one with your spouse. Pay the price, brothers, to be one. At all cost, be one. No price is too great for the one accord, remember

this word.

The third thing in this group is fear. Fear was upon every one of them. Now this fear was not that they were afraid of something. It was not fear about persecution. No. It was the fear of God, the fear of the Lord. Brothers, in a proper church, the saints fear God, God's authority, God's sovereignty, God's righteousness, God's holiness. The church is not a place where there is no fear, where you are just audacious to do whatever you want. God is among us. The Son of Man is walking in our midst. We shouldn't need people to tell us; we all should have the fear of the Lord. And it is in the fear of the Lord that churches go on, in the peace of the Holy Spirit.

Number four, it says they had all things in common. They even sold what they had, you know, possessions, to give to those in need. Now, I'm not advocating some kind of communistic or communal living where we all have things in common in that way. But they did. Why? Because they were just dynamically saved to such an extent that they overcame. They had no consciousness even of their own possessions. They overcame the usurpation of mammon. It was that powerful. So they gave to one another, they shared with one another, so no one would have more, no one would have less. I use a few words to describe this spirit, this situation. One is mutuality. Mutual. It's not just me, it's mutual. I take care of you; you take care of me. It is a member consciousness. When one member suffers, we all suffer. That is what's going on here. That's the spirit. Another word is equality. None higher, none lower. Actually, in the church, there are no wealth classes, there are no social classes. There is no room for those things. Christ is all and in all. We're the same. And Paul, in 2 Corinthians, talked about equality. You know, when he was talking to the Corinthians about giving to the saints in Judea and he was collecting the offerings, he said, so that those who have will not have more; those who are lacking will not have less, that there will be equality. I'm not for some political platform for wealth distribution. Forget about that. I'm talking about when we are so inspired, filled with the Lord's Spirit, there would be such feeling for one another, for the saints, especially those in need, those who have lack, those who are less comely. That's the spirit. That's the condition there. What a church life that is.

**Fourth Group: Churching with Simplicity of Heart,
with Exaltation, Day by Day, from House to House**

I come to the next four. These four things are another description of their situation. They were churching. We use this word *churching* as a verb. Number one, with simplicity of heart. Simplicity of heart – there's a reason why that phrase is used. That word *simplicity* means the heart is simple, or the better word is single. A single heart is one having a single love and a single desire with a single goal. It's just the love for Jesus. They're seeking after the Lord. What a beautiful church life where all the saints have no goal, nothing else, just like Paul: I abandon, I count everything as dung, so that I can just singly pursue Christ. A church where all the saints just love the Lord Jesus, pursuing Him with simplicity and singleness, rather than having their mind seduced and corrupted from that simplicity by the snake. They just are so simple. Actually, a strong church is a simple church, not a complicated and complex church. They even ate their food in simplicity. How about that? Even when they ate, they just loved the Lord.

After the simplicity of heart, there is exaltation. They even ate with exaltation. What is exaltation? Exaltation simply means joy, a joyous expression. You exalt because you are happy. Now, in Paul's instructions in 1 Thessalonians 5, concerning how we practically do the will of God, what did he say as the first thing? It is to rejoice. It says always rejoice. I would not think of that as the first thing, but the first thing to Paul is to always rejoice. This is the will of God: exaltation. I remember in Elden, my goodness, the streets were filled, the homes were filled. Everywhere, when we saw one another, "Praise the Lord! Jesus is Lord! Hallelujah!" I don't see that as much nowadays. Today it's "Hey, how's it going? How's your day?" No, no, we greeted one another with exaltation. And that was not an act. That was not a performance. Brothers, I will tell you that a joyful life is a life of strength. The joy of the Lord is our strength in Nehemiah 8. Brothers, the problem of our church life today is not enough joy, not enough happiness. Who wants to hang around with unhappy people? Who wants to hang out with gloomy people? For our church life to be attractive to draw people, we have to be people of joy, and we have a reason to be joyful. It says in Acts 13:52, "*And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.*" The Holy Spirit and joy are almost synonymous. When you are filled with the Spirit, there's just joy.

There's just joy singing, speaking, praising, making melody when we are filled in the spirit. Look at Ephesians 5 and Colossians 3. Brothers, we need to recover the joy in our church life. The church life is not a place we only endure. There is that part because we need to continue steadfastly. But the church life should also be a place of enjoyment, the top enjoyment of God from drinking the Spirit like wine. When we are filled with the Spirit we will just be overflowing with joy. Brother Witness Lee himself testified that this part of singing and praising is a big part of his own Christian life. On the platform, he could be serious, strong, and weighty. But I tell you, his life as a Christian was also filled with exaltation, so positive and enthusiastic and joyful.

Number three, this church is day by day. It's not a weekly church life, for sure it's not a monthly or annual church life. Our conferences and training may be bi-annual. But our church life is day by day. This keeps occurring again and again, every day, every day. It's a daily church life. We need to help the saints. Wherever we are, we are in the church life. When I'm with my family, I'm still in the church life. The church is everything. Like some of you, I've been in the church now for 50+ years, since Elden hall days. A lot of things I've gone through these 50 some years, good days, bad days, up, down, everything. But I thank the Lord for all these years, by His mercy and grace, I was in the church life. And today, sitting here, I'm giving the Lord the glory and the thanks for preserving me and keeping me, not only in my personal faith in Him, but in the church, the church life. How that church life saved me, preserved me, kept me, guarded me, from going into the world, from going into religion, from all kinds of things. Hallelujah for the church life! Day by day. Day by day.

Number four, house to house. Sure, they got together at the temple or at the portico of Solomon by the temple. That's because they had no meeting hall. When several hundred had to meet, the houses were too small. So sometimes they did that. But primarily, when it was daily, day by day, they met from house to house. I remember Saul when he was breathing persecution, when he was arresting the Jesus-callers, he had a letter from the chief priests to go and arrest them. It's like a warrant, some kind of warrant, to arrest people. He said that he went house to house to find these Christians because that's where they were. The church life is a daily affair. The church life should take place in our homes, in our houses where we gather. That's where we

eat together, that's where we remember the Lord, that's where we preach the gospel. In Acts 5:42, every day, they ceased not proclaiming, announcing, and teaching Christ Jesus as the Lord, in the houses. So every house should be a preaching station, a teaching station. That's what our houses should be. I tell you, it's time to bring the church to our houses. 80% of our church life should be in the homes, and meeting in the halls 20%. Daily, house to house; this will make our house clean and sanctified, because it's for the saints, it's for the Lord. House to house. And in the New Testament, again and again, the church that is in this person's house, the church that is in their house, Aquila and Prisca, Philemon, and whoever else. That's where the church was; they had no meeting hall. They had 8,000 people, and more probably, in Jerusalem, and no meeting hall. I'm not against meeting halls, don't take me wrong. But the practical church life is in our homes. That's why I say, dear saints, we need to help the saints to take care of their marriage life, their family life, their children for the church life. To have the church in our homes means there's no way to hide. We cannot have two faces. We cannot practice hypocrisy. Isn't that a salvation?

**Fifth Group: Praising God, Having Grace,
Preaching Jesus Christ as the Gospel, the Lord Adding Daily**

Coming to the last four things, now we come to their expression. The first thing is praising God. They were just full of praises. The dead praise not the Lord; but let him who has breath praise the Lord. Brothers, we need to recover a praising church, not just a praying church life, but a praising church life. When I see a Christian on the street – praise the Lord! Right away my heart gets uplifted, I get strengthened, I get touched. In today's society, with this cacophony of vitriol and hateful speech, there ought to be some more praising of God. Am I right? Singing and praising God.

The second thing is having grace. This is another part of our church life: having grace. Praising God is related to the Lord, having grace is related to all the people around us. You know, when Barnabas was sent by the apostles in Jerusalem to go up to Antioch to check them out, he said that when he went into their midst, he saw the grace of God. That means the grace of God was visible. The enjoyment of God, which is Christ as everything to His people, is visible. When you touch them, they're just full of grace. When the Lord was growing as a young

boy, He grew up in grace. He was full of grace, and that grace caused men to favor Him. Brothers, today, we are the corporate God-man here to live out Jesus. If we really do, there will be a lot of grace. People would love us. Our neighbors out in the community, they may not understand so many things, but they will see something different. That's grace. When the Lord came, He was full of grace and reality. It's visible, touchable and sense-able.

The next to the last point is that they announced, they preached, they taught Jesus Christ as the gospel. Now here I would like to say a word. You know, sometimes we put truth over here and the gospel over there. That's wrong. The gospel of salvation and the word of the truth are used in apposition by Paul in Eph. 1:13. They're the same thing. One is more for announcing, for evangelizing, for preaching. The other is mainly for teaching, for instructing. But they are all the same thing. Today, when you preach the gospel, you're speaking the truth. Here, especially in the USA, we say we need to propagate the truth. Well, when we preach the gospel, we are propagating the truth. I think in chapter eight of Acts, when these saints in Jerusalem were scattered because of persecution, it says that wherever they went, they preached the word as the gospel. Not the word *of* the gospel, but the word *as* the gospel. When we speak the word, that's the gospel. When we speak the word, it conveys truth. The desire of the Savior God is that all men be saved and come to the full knowledge of the truth.

The last expression is that the Lord added daily to the church those who were being saved. This is talking about increase, growth, fruit-bearing, multiplication. The result of such a church life, brothers, is addition, it is increase. The word of God grew, and the number of the disciples multiplied. When the word grows, the disciples multiply, and many more are added to the church day by day.

Brothers, do you like this picture, this painting? I wish all the churches are like this, whether a small church or a big church. This testimony can be among us; I want to give you the faith today. It was before and it can be today. I hope this picture would inspire all of us these days and would give us some help on how to reset our church, how to renew our church, how to build up a church life that is according to this initial pattern. May the Lord make every one of these ten GTCA churches a model, a pattern, for others to follow. Amen.