

Setting Our Churches Free

by Neil Anderson

This sermon emphasizes the importance of repentance, forgiveness, and unity within the church. It highlights the need to address past hurts, sins, and patterns of behavior that hinder spiritual growth. The speaker shares powerful stories of transformation and restoration, urging listeners to seek God's healing and freedom for themselves and their congregations.

Scripture: Daniel 10:12, Nehemiah 1:6, John 17:20, 2 Corinthians 2:10, James 5:16, Psalm 51:10, Ephesians 4:32, Matthew 18:15

Topics: "Repentance", "Unity in the Church"

Description

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Transcript

Well, this is always a learning experience, isn't it? Coming together. And I look back, having the privilege to share with some of you that were here two years ago. And for some of you, the idea of truth encounter, that you didn't have to deal directly with the demons, you could help the person was kind of new to you.

It was exciting to see so much affirmation coming back two years later saying it works. You know, that Christ is the answer and truth will set people free. And I'm thankful for that feedback from so many of you.

And that was a new thing for some of you. It was a new thing. And it was new for an awful lot of people.

I remember four or five years ago, missionaries will say, I think your truth encounter will work here, but I don't think I'll work overseas. Well, if it's true, it's true for all people all time. The truth of the matter is we had about 4,200 people at the Philippine Convention Center.

Most of them were missionaries and pastors. They were thrilled to death to realize that I could sit down in a quiet, controlled way in a holistic manner, helping people find their freedom in Christ. And so it's exciting to see that.

And the privilege that I've had maybe to contribute a little bit to that. And I want to acknowledge the contribution back to me from two years ago. Like anything else in life, you have certain amount of

experiences that you've never had yet.

And you sit down and you write something as best as you can. I'm a person who desperately wants to be accountable, not just for my morals, people, but for our message. So Dr. Bob Socea at Temple School of Theology reads everything that I have.

And so I go out with a sense of theological confidence. You know, if you knew Bob Socea, you'd appreciate what I'm saying right now. The kind of guy that can ask you all the right questions.

You care enough to ask him, by the way. So I've appreciated that. But as I have gained experience in the area of MPD, for instance, in all honesty, I look back what I originally said in Chapter 10 and released from Boston, I'm embarrassed.

And then your eye starts to open just a little bit more and you kind of go, whoa, man, you know. So what I say in Chapter 10 there reflects probably a graduation from kindergarten to first grade. And I think I'm probably maybe about second grade right now.

And what I do say in there about the spiritual side of it, which is where my expertise was at, is still as true as it ever was. And so you could gain a lot from that, I trust. But listen to some others on some of the integration of MPD.

And I was a baby. And I need to honestly share that with you. It's fascinating how the tendency is to allow pride to come in and say, you know, I've got to keep defending my position.

Yeah, that's wrong, people. I mean, one of the neat things about a body of believers like this is that we really have an opportunity to learn from one another. And I'm trying to tell you, I learned a lot two years ago.

And I'm deeply appreciative to those who helped me in that area. I think if we knew the truth that every one of us right now, from God's perspective, is just starting to have one eye slightly open. You know, you will never learn so much where we don't have to be dependent upon God.

The tendency is to go the opposite direction. I've learned so much now, I don't need God. And seminaries have gone by way of that route.

And they get caught up with their own intellectual arrogance instead of always acknowledging God. And for whatever reason, God has taken me the other direction. The more I've learned, the more I've gone to school, the more experience I've had, the more dependent upon God I've become.

And I really think that we have to do that. It's too easy to fall back on a technique or a program. And that's what I want to share with you first this morning.

I'm setting our churches free to try to analyze what in the world has happened in America. Because when I read my Bible, we are more than conquerors in Christ. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.

You know, he'll supply all my needs. And I see this tremendous sense of victory afforded us. And yet I see the church just struggling and limping along and people in desperate need.

And there's an answer there for that. And so I just really puzzled at that. And I'd like to have Dave turn on my first slide there.

I want to start with individual disciplines first and then move it to corporate problems. Individually, let me tell you what I think we've done. And I think this comes out of academia.

You know, much of this starts at our seminaries and is passed on down. But you can read a passage like Luke 252. The Lord continued to grow in wisdom and stature and favor with God and man.

And some have taken that and said, well, there are personal disciplines that are spiritual, that are mental, that are physical. Based on that, you can come to Christian activities that we should be doing as individuals, as believers. And I think what we've done, and I've done this, is I probably and every one of those up there has given a message sometime or probably a seminar somewhere on those issues.

And because of academia, I think what we've done is we've gone to our concordance and found out everything God had to say about worship, about families, divorce, recovery, marriage, whatever. And you write a book on it and you look at it and you say, yeah, that's good. You know, that seems to really be accurate reflection of what God has to say.

Well, then what's wrong? Why isn't it working? And my answer is this. I believe it's because we have not been connected adequately to the hub of this wheel. Go to that next slide up, Dave, if you would.

We haven't taught our people to abide in Christ. Now, let me illustrate this because I think in going to that, we've jumped to the second half of the epistles that told us how to be fathers and mothers and servants and masters and slaves and whatever else. What happens is we miss the first half of the epistles.

What did the first half do? It established us in Christ. If you're firmly rooted in him, not being built up in him, you can walk in him. But if that's not done first, all you end up with is a subtle form of Christian behavioralism.

Sounds a little bit like this. Stop doing that and start doing this. But we boast in the fact that we're not legalists anymore.

Actually, what's happened is we've just switched from a negative legalism, don't do this, don't do that, don't do that, to a positive legalism. Do this, do this, do this, do this, do this. And we're driving our people into the stops.

Or that's not the best way to do it. Here's a better way to do it. And you start huffing and puffing your way through.

Now, the classic example to this is the whole problem with our families and marriages. When the 60s came and society just exploded on us and just families started to fall apart. Prior to 1960, you could recite studies that said if a family prayed together, worshiped together, only one in a thousand or so would separate.

Nobody's given that stat anymore. The divorce rate in our churches is pretty much the same. Well, in response to that, our seminary programs and our churches just said, we forgot the family.

And man, what used to be evangelism and discipleship got turned over to clinical psychology and everything was save the family, family first. And it's the greatest felt need in America today. Go down to

your Christian bookstore and see what the big sellers are.

It's divorce recovery and single parenting. And because it's an overwhelming need that we have, focus on the family sprung up great organization. Never in the history of the church has there been a more concerted effort to save the family.

But with all of those books, all those programs, all those degrees, how are we doing? Gotten any better people? No. Is there something wrong with those programs and those books? No. By and large, it's very good stuff.

But here's my presupposition. Paul has often divided his epistles into the first half of the second half. I was told as a student, that's the theological section.

Here's the practical section. What did this section do? It established you in Christ. See, here's my belief.

You get a person free in Christ, they will instinctively do the second half of the epistles. That will be the natural thing for them to do. But boy, you've got a person to just try to behave right.

When their belief is wrong about who they are themselves, they have no understanding of the nature of the battle going on for their life, it just doesn't work. Well, try harder. I'm trying harder.

And we're running our people into absolute exhaustion when the Sabbath rest remains for us. When we come to the end of our resources, we discover God's. Well, I think we've done the same thing corporately.

Let me throw up the next slide. Then we saw the church struggling. And you look at the whole rise of church growth in the late 70s and 80s.

If you look back in terms of church history, the decade of church growth in terms of studies and programs and degrees, it was church growth. I mean, the pastors ran off, got the doctor of ministries and church growth. People became consultants.

Oftentimes they didn't do very well in churches, so they became consultants. That's more true than we'd ever care to admit. But I know people because I've taught them.

I've been teaching doctoral classes for a long time right now. And we have just laid out all kinds of things. Here's the church.

Here's what we should do. Here's worship and prayer and learn all kinds of church disciplines. So why isn't it working? Did the church grow in the 80s? Actually, I think if we went back to the early 80s, that the evangelical community was really respected as a political force, for instance.

Now, not at all. Not at all. We're just being patronized in America today.

Do you realize that? Sure, you got religious freedom, but you stay out of public education. You stay out of politics. You stay out of government.

It's just amazing how we're just being patronized today. And here's the church, the pillar and support of the truth. They said, well, we got to bear fruit.

See, that's the problem. Go to John 15. This is my father glorified that you got to bear fruit.

You must bear fruit. Oh, we got to bear fruit. No, you don't.

You've got to abide in Christ. That's what you have to do. If you abide in Christ, you will bear fruit.

And somehow we've missed that. It's such a subtle thing. We put all of our confidence in our programs, in our strategies, instead of in Christ.

I remember we had a privilege about a little over a year ago to go up to the first Baptist Modesto. And for years, Bill Yeager had been the pastor there and had this institute of church imperatives. And I'll tell you what, I don't know of any church in the 70s or 80s that really tried to understand New Testament church growth, put it into practice.

They were the first of the leaders to have cell groups, board groups, and tremendous evangelistic training there. People all over the world flocked there. But for 10 years, they have just flat.

They watched our counseling video that I've done as a pastoral staff, and they called us and said, can you come up here? You just set our whole staff free. I mean, I really don't know what they did, but they decided they weren't going to just watch it. They were going to do it.

And by now, Yeager's retired and the new church has come in. And I went up and I explained this to them, what's happened now, just plateaued, struggling to bear fruit, struggling to maintain it, just maintenance type ministry with the best programs probably in the United States. Seriously.

Almost all of their staff, 20 or so, had been born out of that old church and come back and matured and disciplined there, which is an incredible testimony for that church. They realized when they saw this, what exactly was going on. All their confidence now was in their programs and their strategies.

Good people come along and they develop some because they have a heart for God. The next generation comes along and they think it's the program or the strategy. They don't realize it was the heart of that man that began all of that.

So we're looking for better methods and God's looking for better men. You've heard that before, but it's a subtle thing. Then I started to realize that that was going out to churches, that you'd help individuals find their freedom in Christ, but man, there was a pall hanging over this church.

We started to entertain the thought. I think there's a sense of corporate bondage that as a leadership, we have not dealt with our issues. We've swept stuff under the carpet.

The way our society has gone in America, you got three or four generations of people there and they got accumulating garbage in their life and problems and they're never being resolved. Oftentimes our preaching has been behavioralistically. I know because I've been in a seminary and realizing that that's the objective.

There's something now you ought to do when you leave this church and now you ought to get your act together and you ought to be a better husband, a better wife. Oh boy, okay, I'll try, but if you really are a spiritual person, come back tonight and I'll give you three things you ought to do. But if you're real sick, I'll come back Wednesday night when we can really lay it on the saints and here's about seven things you ought to do.

After a while, the people, oh man, I can't do that anymore. I'm trying, okay. I'll tell you, I think one of our problem is that the intention of worship is not necessarily to come and find out 10 more things that I need to do.

I think what you ought to celebrate is what Christ has already done, that the war has already been won and that the worrying factors have already been resolved and we're to hang on. See, that's our problem is that our people are getting beat up in society enough and then we come get beat them up some more in church. We got to get our people free.

We got to get our churches free. And I think if that happened, people, you'd see some incredible things take place in our society. I think it is so bad right now.

I think Swindoll was right. The church is much like those are. I mean, you couldn't stand the stink inside if it wasn't for the storm outside.

And I mean, there is a storm outside, but I mean, I'm sure if you've done that kind of ministry and you sit and have people time after time, forgive the church leader, forgive the church leader, forgive the church leaders because they haven't dealt with issues. They've covered it up. And as I've gone out and shared this concept, it is incredible how people say, you're talking about my church.

There are not very many healthy churches out there. I mean, where that are living organisms, substantially bearing fruit. And I think that we have put almost all of our confidence and our degrees and our programs and our strategies instead of in Christ.

I mean, it is so subtle because it looks so good. It could be theologically right, but just dead. So I'd like you to take your Bibles and turn with me if you went to a revelation two and three, let's see how God views his church.

He's going to write to some churches here, seven, and you know, the text here a little bit. I want to point out some subtle things about this whole context. One is that we are clearly told that in chapter one, verse 20, as for the mystery of the seven stars, which you saw in my right hand and the seven golden lampstands, the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches.

And the seven lampstands are the seven churches. If these are literal churches, they're literal angels. And that's who it is written to here.

Those angels are in the right hand of God to bring judgment, to bring rewards and to carry out his work. Now, one of the important concepts as you would read through these two chapters here is to realize the incredible presence of God. There are 50 times, plus 50 times where the Lord in rightness, I am there.

It was me, it's I, that the Lord is moving amongst his church today. Chapter two, verse one says, the one who holds the seven stars in his right hand, the one who walks among the seven golden lampstands says this, he's walking amongst our churches today. It bothers me.

Oh, God be here. God's here. That's a denial of the omnipresence of God.

Thank you, Lord, that you're here, but he's here right now. He's in your life and he's moving amongst us right now. Then you say, well, this is about angels.

Not really. When each one of these begins, he said, I know your deeds. God knows what we're doing.

He knows the nature of our churches. Everyone starts with that. Everyone ends with he who has an ear to hear, let him hear what the spirit has to say.

And I'm telling you, I really believe if we would spend a lot more time listening to God and talking to him, I think we had better churches. I think he wants to say something. I think he wants to write a letter to our churches.

I really believe that and say, listen, this is what I think of your churches. And you go through these and they're, to me, they're just incredibly representative of the churches of the ages. But let me just walk quickly through them without trying to read them all.

It would take too much time to do that. But the church at Ephesus is probably the one that we're most familiar with because it is the classic legalistic church to me. They're doing all the right things.

They're doing it. They hate evil. They got the right programs.

To be honest with you, of all the churches, this one has the best spokes. They got great spokes, but they lost the first love. They're not connected to the hub.

It's just a bunch of behavioralism is all it is. We're trying to change people's behavior. God's trying to change our belief.

As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he. What do we see? So is he. So what do we try to change? But so is he.

Come on, back up a notch. It's what's going on between the ears. The battle isn't out there.

It's right here between the ears. Hence the necessity to take every thought captive to the beatings of Christ. I think God is throwing it back at our faith.

We thought for the longest time our problem is Washington. And we need a righteous president. So he gave us Clinton.

And I believe judgment begins in the household of God. We want to clean up Washington. God wants to clean up his churches.

We're concerned about church growth. God's concerned about church purity. You know why? It's a prerequisite to legitimate church growth.

Purity first. Well, here's this poor church. And they're struggling along.

He said, you lost your first love. Well, how do I get that back? Go back and do the deeds you did at first. I mean, you're just carrying out these motions.

Get back there. Renew your church. And then you come to the church of Smyrna.

Here's a defeated church. I mean, they are so spiritually under attack. It was a synagogue of Satan.

That's what he says. And boy, I said, hang on. The whole instruction there is hang on.

Let him who endures to the end. And because there are churches out there are incredibly under siege today. Their ministry is probably yours.

Incredibly under siege today. And God looks down and says, well, these bad people are attacking your ministry. In God's perspective, synagogue of Satan.

Then the message of Pergamum. It said, this is the religious tolerance church. I mean, they are entertaining stuff and grabbing books over here.

And they're just watering down their whole ministry. They've got major problems. They're teaching the teachings of Balaam and sacrificing the idols.

And yet there's good there. It's that mixture of a religiously tolerant church. Well, you know, I don't agree with that, but we tolerate a lot of stuff in our church that I don't think you should tolerate.

I mean, this is the day of discernment because these people, I think we're really quite deceived and we need some sense of discernment. And I've gone into churches and people, well, what's wrong with spirit guides? You know, they're helpful, aren't they? They're demons. You can't believe how new age medicine has crept into our churches and people dealing with iron ology and reflexology.

And I said, get hold of a couple of books in this area and read up on it because, because the medical profession is just being besieged by new age teaching. Most of our nurses are going off getting new age teaching. And University Press's book, *New Age Medicine*, would be probably where I would encourage you to start.

David and Sharon Sneed wrote a book, *The Hidden Agenda*, by Thomas Nelson, that he was so concerned on Austin, Texas, because of the tremendous amount of instruction that his nurses were getting in the hospital. Well, anyway, it's a Duke's mixture. The message to Thyatira is that's a new age church.

They actually tolerate a false prophetess there, right in their own church. False prophet. I've had people come to me and say, what about this gal in my church? I mean, this woman is icky, sticky, spiritual.

Boy, she just seems like she's got a window through everything that's going on. She can see spirits and she can point out people's sex problem. Great gift from God, right? No.

I said, let me tell you about her. I said, your husband's not a Christian. The kids are all rebellious.

Well, how did you know that? I said, it's wrong spirit, folks. And we'll let somebody who's deeply in trouble with their other areas of their life, but boy, they're religiously brilliant. That's an inconsistency with scripture.

The leaders that we ought to listen to are those who are submissive, servant heart people who are mature in the Lord. Not some poor person who's gone through a pile of junk and all of a sudden she's spiritually brilliant. I think she's spiritually deceived, to be honest with you.

You pay attention to what she has to say and I'll almost guarantee you, you'll go down the wrong path. And it isn't just her. I don't want to sound like a chauvinist here or something like that.

There are men, but the problem is our ladies are just simply more spiritually inclined. By the way, for good and evil, you'll find more of our ladies are more spiritually deep than our men are as an average in the church. You'll also find more ladies in new age and you name it.

Well, and so here's a new age church. It just fits so well to us today. And then you've got the dead church, Sardis.

I mean, it's dead. This is the one that really looks good. We got great facilities, great choir robes.

You're dead. It's a sad, sad church. The one good church seems to have been a message to Philadelphia, but they were under siege as well.

And then of course, everybody knows about Laodicea, the lukewarm church. I wish that you were hot or cold. They need the Mississippi squirrel revival.

First self-righteous church of Pascagoula, whatever it was. I don't know if you've seen that little cartoon strip, but it's kind of exciting. But that's our churches today.

One or two healthy ones, some of the things doing the right thing. Others have tolerated religious junk. Some of them got deep spiritual problems and others are just going through the motions.

Well, what are we going to do about this? The problem with corporate bondage is the fact that, so whose responsibility is this? They look at the pastor, he tries to do something, run them off. And the board, well, it's our responsibility, but they don't know what to do about it. I mean, the whole problem with bondage is right here because nobody likes living in bondage.

Can you accept that? Nobody likes living in bondage. If they knew how to get out of it, they'd have gotten out of it a long time ago, believe you me. And we're sitting in a church and that pastor, he's kind of, it's like a fanatic.

He's lost sight of where he should go. So he just doubles his efforts and he just tries harder and harder. And I'll, you know, I got to preach better and the choir's got to sing better.

And the more they try, nothing happens. My heart goes out to that one. And chances are there is a whole six series of generations of problem in that church that have never been resolved.

You're swept under the carpet and the problem continues on. You know, as you read in the old Testament, it says that all the Kings of Israel, when the nation divided, every one of them, none of them are godly. Every one of them, the scripture says they continued in the sins of Jeroboam.

They just perpetuated the air. I personally believe that any one of those Kings could have said he was wrong. We should never have divided this nation.

That was a rebellious split. We went against God at that time. We turned our back at God.

We should have not worshiped up here. We should have worked in Jerusalem and could have led that back. None of them did.

The only exceptions were basically Nehemiah and Daniel and Ezra, and they all just stood corporately. We have sinned. We've sinned.

Now, here's a hard thing for some people to accept that if you continue to allow a certain problem like that to exist in your church, from God's perspective, you are as guilty of that as the one who initially did it. It's like dealing with somebody that is an incest victim, and you help them work through that crisis, and they need to forgive their father-in-law who did that, but if they knew that their mother knew about it and didn't do anything, which would be the harder one to forgive? Your mother. You say, well, I got a board.

Yeah, we got this bad guy in our church, and you allow him to continue to beat up the pastor and to destroy the work of that church. I'm saying before God that that board, that group of people is as guilty as the one who's doing it if you don't stand against it. I know that's sobering, but that's that tolerance.

He said, Daniel, we've sinned. We're here for 70 years in exile. Why? Because for 490 years, they failed to observe that that land should have been laid fallow every seven years.

That's why we're here, but he said, we've sinned. I'm part of that. I was part of the group that allowed it to continue on like that.

I did not stand up and say anything. Well, so we've sat down. We've been working now for some time.

We've taken about 19 churches through a process. We're all aboard. All the staff come together, and we sit down, and we work through this, and our whole concern is, would you listen to what God is saying to your church? Do you see your church from the way God is seeing it today? I mean, it's very easy to cover up and be defensive here.

By the way, before I go on, let me tell you something. We say it very strongly in the book. Don't attempt this if your people are individually in bondage, because it won't work.

It's like trying to get a family to work together and family dynamics and systems. You're all dealing with the behavior now. You've got to get the individuals out of bondage first, and so we'll spend a Friday night, and it's one of the appendix in the book, to walk all the staff and the leadership through those steps to freedom.

Clean up your own house first. Now, if that's clean, now we can get together and come together. We're also working on a family structure of a family bondage problem that a husband and wife work through those issues in terms of what has been tolerated and permitted in their family over years, and to clean that house like that.

So, there's an end up to be seven steps again. I'm sorry. It just kind of ended up that way.

Something magical about seven. It seems to fit the book of Revelation very well, however. Awful lot of sevens there, and so we start with strengths.

I have this for you. You know, we're not out trying to say you're not doing anything right. That's not true.

Most of our people are really trying to do the best they can. I really believe that. A lot of our churches are really struggling, would really like to do, and they are doing a few things well, and so they pray and ask God, show us.

What are we doing well? Make a list. We put a big old butcher paper thing on a wall, and they write down and list their strengths at the end of thank you God, and we just trust that you allow us to continue to do this well. Now, what are our weaknesses? What haven't we done well? And usually that list gets bigger than the other one.

It's true, and a back burner, you know, stuff got shoved off. Hadn't dealt with it as a church, and we haven't been concerned about these people here and whatever, so they make a list of that, and then we deal with painful memories. Boy, memories, they shape our sense of worth, our perspective of our own church.

There are people embarrassed about their church. You know how many times in the last two, three years I've sat with pastors, and I said, can I ask you a personal question? I said, if you weren't pastoring here right now, would you come to this church yourself? I'm telling you, the majority has said no. Now, how would you like to sit there and labor in the vineyard like that, and you've got a church under your charge that you personally would not feel comfortable inviting people to? That would be incredibly discouraging, wouldn't it? I mean, I don't know.

I would probably feel like leaving, but I have seen that so many times, that no, I don't want to leave these people here. They don't even treat visitors very well or run a few off or whatever, but it either builds or destroys morale. There's good and bad memories here.

Much of worship in the Old Testament was recall the things that God done. It's a mental process that you go back, and remember when he did this, remember when he did that, and if you look at the revival under several of them, that's what they did. They went back.

That's how they worshiped God. He took us through the sea. He brought us here, and he's delivered, and so thank God for the good memories, because they do build morale, but if those things aren't resolved, then stories come up and rumors come up, and those things that we thought we buried in the past are our emotional joys as well as pains.

They're a source of pride, but also shame for our church, a source of happiness and sadness for health and disease, and we just list that. It's amazing to see grown men come in there and get in touch with two or three generations of junk that's gone on in the church, and you say, well, it's resolved. The bad people are gone.

Pain's still there, still there, and boy, they just come to tears when they start to recall, and then they work through a whole sense of corporate repentance of that. God, I forgive, and I release that person, and I ask you to bless them, and man, that'll bring up some really tough commitment of their will, but we're told to bless those who curse us, and these people have left, and it's hard to just exercise my will. I mean, we sat as a staff, and you know, you do my ministry, you're going to get some opposition.

I mean, you got to count on that. You know, Paul had Alexander the coppersmith. Me and my hen, Sam Bellon, to buy her.

Jesus had the whole world, you know, was willing to crucify him, so I mean, and they stoned the prophets, and you say, I want people to like me. You know, I don't like people who not like me, but if you can imagine, there's been some pretty heavy attacks. I remember one guy came to me one time.

In fact, Bill Walthall is here. He said, isn't it interesting, Neal, that when Jesus went out and withered that guy with a withered hand, it healed him. Now, if anybody's heart was right there, it said, oh, thank you for healing that man's hand.

It was withered before, now it's healed. What did they do? They conspired against him. What a wicked heart.

Think about that. He did an incredible act of grace of God in that man's life. He conspired against him.

You're going to set a few people free, you know, conspire against you. I've had to have the privilege to help people. They're free, they're changed, their whole life is different, and I'm turning against me.

You just kind of, is that possible? Yes, it's possible. Look at the man laying by the pool of Bethesda, 57 years. Do you want to be well? That's either the cruelest question in the New Testament or the most profound.

It's the latter. Did he want to be well? No. He liked laying there in his sickness.

You know what you would have done? If you're at this conference, this is what you would have done. I'd have rolled over there somehow. If I thought that that old angel would stir up that pool and I would be healed if I got in, I'd find some way to get into that pool.

And I think you would too. And Sid, what did he do? The Lord healed him anyhow. And what happened? Went and turned him in.

This guy healed me on the Sabbath. Read it. It's incredible.

And you know, the story of the 10 that were healed, only one went back and thanked him. You know, but praise God. Anyhow, you had a chance to help those people, and it's wonderful.

Well, anyway, working through this thing is tough. Do you realize that 2 Corinthians 2, it says that we're urged to forgive, for we're not ignorant of Satan's schemes. That were their anointed thoughts.

That's the battle right in here. Is that a personal forgiveness there or corporate one? Corporate. Look at the context.

They had to discipline somebody in their fellowship. And he said, no, stop it. You don't forgive this person.

And that's what we have to do. Otherwise that past will just continue to hang on to us. He said, but he's left the church.

So the problem's over with. No, it's not. I mean, if you work people through our steps to freedom and you get to forgiveness, you're going to find forgiveness is the biggest ticket to freedom there is.

That is Satan's greatest grounds to the church today. The greatest access he has is a bitter spirit on forgiveness. That's been the overwhelming experience of us.

You're still hooked to the past. And we can do that corporately. We had this bad problem here.

Well, you haven't dealt with it. I started out the book with a true story of a pastor. Let me know.

I got ahold of our material and that nice guy. And I was telling people who they are in Christ. And he's the third pastor they had.

The first one had a rebellious split. And that's how they started. The church had a more problem.

They ran him off, got a young pastor, their first pastor. They ran him off. Now he's the third one.

But he was assured that the problem people were gone now. So the church is okay. You all come.

But the trouble of it is, is that it hadn't been resolved. And so he looked through the minutes and said, you didn't treat your last pastor, right? Well, it was really the other people, the leadership that did it, weren't even there anymore. But as a church, they had not dealt properly with that pastor.

And so they called him and asked him if he'd come back. That guy left the ministry after that. And so he reluctantly agreed to come back apparently.

And they stood before the church and the chairman read a list of offenses that they had done to him as a pastor and asked his forgiveness. And they said, there wasn't a dry eye out there. And everybody thought, well, it's gone.

He's gone. All the problems are over with. It's not over with.

You just buried it alive. It's not buried dead. You haven't forgiven.

You haven't worked through it. And we sit time after time in our churches and realize how many people need to forgive their pastors and the elders because they swept over it. They didn't, they didn't tell their people.

I said, why? We're Christians. We're supposed to walk into life and speak the truth for members of one another. Why are we covering up something in the church? There is nothing covered that won't be revealed.

Nothing. You can't cover that up. And if you don't do it voluntarily, you'll do it.

David, you had nine months to confess your sin because you didn't. I'm going to, your, your sons will sleep with your wives on the rooftops of Israel. And they did.

Oh, it's sobering. How am I doing? A lot of time and memories. Uh, forgiveness.

I mean, just watch them work through that as a corporate body. Incredible corporate sins, patterns of behavior. They felt like they've tolerated stuff in their church, just like they did in these churches here in revelation.

They've allowed that to continue on. They're guilty for it. They stand before God and patterns of behavior that they've allowed themselves to be involved in.

Let me just, uh, uh, read briefly. If I may listen to Daniel 10 minutes, listen to Daniel's confession. Oh Lord, the great and awesome God, who keeps his covenant of love with all who love him and obey his commands.

We have sinned and done wrong. We've been wicked in every bell. Look at the weeds here.

This is Daniel. He has a great heart for God. And he's sitting over there in Babylon.

We've turned away from your commands and laws. We have not listened to your servants, the prophets who spoken your name to our Kings, our princes and our fathers and to all the people of the land. Lord, you're righteous.

But this day we're covered with shame. The men of Judah and people of Jerusalem and all Israel, both near and far in all the countries where you have scattered us because of our unfaithfulness to you. Oh

Lord, we and our Kings, our princes and our fathers have covered with shame because we have sinned against you.

The Lord, our God is merciful and forgiving. Even though we have rebelled against him, we've not obeyed the Lord, our God, or kept the laws he gave us to his servants and prophets. All Israel has transgressed your law and turned away, refusing to obey you.

Therefore, the curses and sworn judgment written in the law of Moses, the servant of God have been poured forth on us because we've sinned against you. Nehemiah did exactly the same thing. Basically he said, we have sinned.

And secondly, his point was, you have the right to deal justly with us. And that's why we're here right now. That's why these walls are broken down.

You had a right to do that and, and, and acknowledge that it's, it's fascinating to see how that stuff has not dealt with that the sins of one generation will pass on to another generation. And I'm saying, dear people, we can put a stop to that. We can stand and deal with this.

I had a pastor call me and said, you know, this church began as a rebellious split, wonderful pastor, love the Lord. If I lived in that area, I'd go to his church, but he's done nothing. It's just kind of maintained for years.

And I puzzled at that. And I, you know, this guy's a dear guy. He said, you know, I've, I really think I have everybody since I've been here is really questioned my leadership.

And just like a rebellious spirit, he said, I don't know if this makes sense. He said, but this church started that way. It was an ugly split in this town.

All the people there are now gone, but the problem seems to remain. And he said, what do you think about bringing our congregation together and asking God to forgive us for rebelling based on the fact that John 17 says, I pray that you'd all be one, but we weren't one. We were divided.

And boy, he said, that was one of the most moving things I've ever done in my church. People realized that he said, after the church body said, we have sin, we have rebelled against God. We ask you forgiveness.

It's just like the magic here. This is the repentance issue to me. You know, I don't think you should go out in history, try to get rid of some spirits that's hovering over your church.

I think the problem is, is repentance. You know, we got garbage in our lives and they attract flies. Oh, get rid of the flies.

Oh, get rid of the garbage. We got garbage in our church. It's attract flies.

It's a synagogue of Satan. Get rid of Satan. No, get rid of the garbage.

Get rid of the garbage. Well, perfect sins, patterns of behavior. Then there's another one.

You're under attack. Like one particular church here was simply because they're doing something right. That was the church at Smyrna.

They're under attack. Hang in there. Hold on.

He said, now you're under attack. Can we stand against that? I think we really can. Let me read what Chuck said in this area.

I think you'll just love it. In reference to those churches, pulling out a scripture, he says to Smyrna, I know the slander of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer.

I tell you, the devil will put some of you in prison to test you and you will suffer persecution for 10 days. Here's Chuck's comments. He said, what people saw were Jews who slandered the Christians in Smyrna church.

What Jesus saw was a synagogue of Satan. What people saw were Roman rulers who threw Christians in jail. What Jesus saw was the devil who put some in prison.

Not all synagogues were demonized. This one was. Not all authorities believe lies about Christians, but in Smyrna, the Roman overlords did, and they were under attack.

They were under attack. To Pergamum, he said, I know where you live. Where do they live? Where Satan has his throne.

What people saw was a city on a hill with major temples in it. What Jesus saw was Satan's throne. What people saw was the center of the empire worship in Asia.

What Jesus saw was the city where Satan lived. This place was oppressive to Christians. To the church of Thyatira, he said, now I say to the rest of you in Thyatira, to you who do not hold to her teaching and have not learned Satan's so-called deep secrets.

You know what I would equate that to today? The sixth and seventh book of Moses. The course on miracles. The junk that is passed around under the name of Christianity today seeming to be Christian, but it really wasn't at all.

And those things were tolerated there. What people saw was a prophetess who taught that since grace covered every sin, it was okay to indulge in pagan temple feasts. That's what people saw.

What did God see? Thought of Satan's trap. To the church of Philadelphia, he said, I will make those who are the synagogue of Satan, who claim to be Jews, though they are not, but are liars. He said, what people saw were two religious groups who had different interpretations about the belief.

What Jesus saw was a demonized synagogue. What people saw was deep animosity that had religious roots. What Jesus saw was a pack of liars who were about to be proved wrong.

What people saw were allegations of dangerous practices and beliefs of Christians. What Jesus saw was a church wrongly accused. I mean, how the Lord sees our church is probably quite different from ours.

And I think if we will listen to the spirit and he will share with us, I really believe that. And I think the answer out of this thing, as God, as we've learned in our ministry, and we constantly get the, just put it back on the people, would you pray right now and ask God what it is that's keeping you in bondage? Boy, I'll tell you what, God does it. He wants our people free.

Now, will you deal with the issue? The answer now is repentance. And once that repentance is there, you have all the authority you need to do to commit that property, your ministry to the Lord. And I personally feel we got to get God back into our personal lives.

We got to get God back into our marriages. We've got to get God back as the chairman of our board. We've got to do that because if we don't, it can end up to be a synagogue of Satan.

And then we develop out of that thing and take all the information that they put up and make a prayer action plan. Specifically, how are we going to do with that? And we make a list of specific things that are identified. So our prayers aren't just kind of God help us kind of a thing.

God'll help you. I promise he would. I mean, he's all the strength you need.

I mean, he is your answer. He said, but there's four things. We make a list and synthesize all the stuff that we gather together.

We renounce is our response to the command to repent. We renounce that. What is wrong? And we announced that's his commitment to remember.

He said, remember the deeds you've done at first. What is the right thing? What should you be doing? And we affirm that's in response to hold on a number of times. He said, now, hold on.

They said, we will. That's his commandment to bathe. And so to get a group of leaders to do that, I mean, you know, the potential here is awesome people.

Awesome. Say, what's the catch? The catch is there's going to be a legalistic pastor and a sick controlling board member who's not going to want this book in his church. That's what's going to happen.

And some nice meeting lay person will say, pastor, you ought to read this book. This is what our church needs. And that will be on another hit list from about a whole bunch of pastors who don't want to walk in the light.

You see men love darkness more than light because their deeds are evil. And you go and you find it and you'll get all kinds of surface things and they'll try to attack you on your theology or whatever else. I said, that's not in people.

That's just a dodge. I've learned that years ago, people come up. Well, Neil, it says right here in the Bible.

I said, you know, that's a good question. I said, can I ask you personally, what's going on? Is it your marriage? You know, you can hide behind a pulpit. You can hide behind your theology very easily and use it as a defense.

And then people do that as a religious defense. And it's a tragic one. One guy came to me one time.

He said, Neil, my problem is canonicity. And honestly, all I could think of was a canon for a moment. I said, oh, you mean the closing of the canon? He said, yeah, I've read seven books on it.

Seven books on the canon. Are there seven books on the canon? I read seven paragraphs years ago. And do you think his problem is canonicity? It wasn't at all.

It was his father. And we sat down and worked through forgiveness. And the guy bonded with God that night and gave a credible testimony the next morning.

And I said, oh, I'll tell you what. Dear people, it's a call to get our churches and our people free. I think if that happened, we could just see incredible things happen.

And you know what? I think God has waited and so it's so bad that he can finally do something. I mean, we've tried everything. He said, are you done trying? Thank you.

If you forget about your little program and your strategy right now, talk to me and get back in here. Because frankly, if I'm in it, anything will work. And if God isn't in it, nothing will work.

And well, anyway, let me close with this. Probably the neatest Christmas present I've ever received in my life. This has to be one of the most abused human beings I've ever dealt with.

I helped her get out of the initial incredible first layer of this unbelievable onion. And the change was to my 18 years in counseling. And the first layer was a huge slab.

And her counselor came in with me. And then she started to realize the MPD started to surface and getting some help. But she wrote this to my wife and I. She was so abused that my wife had to be with her and myself just initially just to talk with her.

Because just to have her being alone with a man who sexually violated her in the past, she couldn't do it. So Gwen was just with me. And not needed anymore, by the way.

But anyway, she has captured to me the message of the church in a remarkable way. She said, while on vacation as a child one year, I happened upon a gold watch that I had noticed was lying on the ground. It was covered with dirt and gravel and was faced down in the parking lot of our motel.

At first glance, it did not seem worth the effort to bend down and pick it up. But for some reason, I found myself reaching for it anyway. The crystal was broken.

The watch band was gone. There was moisture on the dial. From all appearances, there was no logical reason to believe this watch would still work.

Every indication was that its next stop would be the trash can. Those in my family who were with me at the time laughed at me for picking it up. My mother even scolded me for holding such a dirty object that was so obviously destroyed.

As I reached for the winding stem, my brother made comment as to my lack of intelligence. Been run over by cars, he chided. Nothing can endure that kind of treatment.

As I turned the stem, the second hand of the watch began to move. My family was wrong. Truly, odds were against the watch working.

But there was one thing no one thought of. No matter how broken the outside was, if the inside was not damaged, it would still run. And indeed, it did keep perfect time.

This watch was made to keep time. Its outside appearance had nothing to do with the purpose for which it was designed. Although the appearance was damaged, the inside was untouched and in perfect

condition.

Twenty-five years later, I still have that watch. I take it out every once in a while and wind it up. It still works.

I think as long as the inside remains untouched, it always will. However, unless I had bothered to pick it up and try to wind it years ago, I never would have known the part of the watch that really mattered was still in perfect condition. Although it looks like a piece of junk, it will always be a treasure to me because I looked beyond the outside appearances and believed in what really mattered, its ability to function in the manner for which it was created.

Thank you, Neil and Joanne, for making the effort to pick up the watch and turn the stem. You're helping me to see that my emotions may be damaged, but my soul is still in perfect condition. And that is what was created to be with Christ, the only permanent part, the part that really matters.

I know that deep within my heart, no matter what my feelings are telling me, this is true. I also believe that with the help of God's servants, even the casing can be repaired and maybe even that will become functional again. Well, she's working with Jim Friesen right now.

God's doing a marvelous thing in her life. Well, that's the role of the church. There's people all over this world who've been run over by cars, damaged, abused, battered, beaten, rejected, and criticized and put down.

And I think it's the work of the church to pick up that watch and turn the stem. But if we're going to be an answer to the high priestly prayer in John 17, what he is praying for in us, we're going to have to learn to do that in truth and in unity and in love. Let's pray for our church.

Father, if you look down and you see your body badly beaten and bruised, I want to thank you that you have given us a plan, a way, that if we would return to you, Father, if we would find our freedom and to connect our people to God and to realize that we're not the wonderful counselor, but you are, that you're looking for the right people, not necessarily the right method. And so Father, may we just daily declare that sense of dependency upon you and we could be used of you to bring release and freedom to your people, to your churches. I just want to publicly for the first time, just commit this book to you and trust that God will be used in the right way, not to beat somebody over the head, but Father, to bring freedom to our churches, to our people.

I know that's your desire. I know that that's something we can ask according to your will, because that's why you went to the cross, to purchase that freedom. And I know you love your church.

I love your people. Thank you for it. In Jesus' name.

Video: <https://sermonindex2.b-cdn.net/esHeCOaBNDI.mp4>

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