

Cleansing of the Church

by Steve Gallagher

The sermon explores the purity and revival of the early church, and the contrast between those who were truly following God and those who were motivated by self-gain.

Duration: 54:41

Scripture: Luke 12:47-48, Acts 2:43, Acts 5:11-12, Acts 5:15-16, James 3:1

Topics: "Church Discipline", "Fear Of God"

Description

This sermon delves into the early days of the church, highlighting the atmosphere of God's presence, the fear of the Lord, and the consequences of spiritual responsibility. It contrasts the judgment of Ananias and Sapphira for lying with the actions of Annas and Caiaphas who persecuted God's people. The fear of the Lord is emphasized as a vital aspect of a healthy church, and the principle of greater accountability with greater light is explored.

Transcript

Let's open with the word of prayer. Lord, I do thank you again for this marvelous historical account of the origins of your church. Your church, Lord, your bride, all these various saints and the struggles, and the battles, and the victories, and the defeats, and all that they went through, Lord, at one day, they will be able to carry all of it and lay it before your feet.

And live forever in your glory. We will, Lord. We thank you for this account of what it was like in the earliest days of the church when there was still that purity, and revival was in the land, and God's presence was everywhere amongst his people.

What it was like. Lord, thank you for giving us this account. We pray that you'll make it real to us here this morning in Jesus' name.

Amen. Okay. Last session, we covered Chapter 3 and most of Chapter 4. And so, we ended at verse 31 of Chapter 4, the last time.

And then at the end of Chapter 4, like at the end of Chapter 2, if you remember that, there's another one of Luke's summaries. And I'm going to be touching on this towards the end. So, I'm going to skip through this for now.

But this is describing, again, an overview of what the atmosphere was like amongst God's people in the early days of the church. But then a story begins to unfold. And again, like I said to you before, that Luke, as a historian, is combining these summary statements with these little vignettes, these little stories to try to illustrate how the church came into being, and how it grew, and all of that.

And how the Lord, through the Holy Spirit, working through men of God, established something upon this earth. That's what's going on here, okay? And so, here's one of these stories. Actually, Chapter 5 has two stories.

And the story in Chapter 5 actually begins at the end of Chapter 4. So, let's pick up at verse 34. It's in the middle of this summary statement. And I'm just going to jump in.

For there was not a needy person among them. For all who were owners of land or houses would sell them, and bring the proceeds of the sales, and lay them at the apostles' feet. And they would be distributed to each as any had need.

Now, Joseph, a Levite of Cyprian birth, who was also called Barnabas by the apostles, which translated means son of encouragement, and who owned a tract of land, sold it, and brought the money, and laid it at the apostles' feet. But a man named Ananias, with his wife Sapphira, sold a piece of property, and kept back some of the price for himself, with his wife's full knowledge, and bringing a portion of it, he laid it at the apostles' feet. Okay, now as I said, we have heaven on earth here, in this story.

There has never been such a time. You know, there have been little, I don't know, there have been little periods when God moved closer, and usually in local settings and stuff. This is one of those times, but the church was still in its infancy, and in its purity, and it was a blessed time.

And because people's lives had been so deeply impacted by the wonderful news of the gospel, because of that, this spirit of self-sacrifice kind of prevailed amongst God's people. And those who had means, were willing to share what they had with those who were in need. And so that's what was going on here.

And by the way, just kind of a side note, if you've ever heard the expression or term Christian communism, that is not what this is. In communism thinking, everyone has equal shares, okay? That's not what was going on here. In Christian, well, in the church, when things are as they should be, you know, people who have been blessed with abundance, it's not that they give it all away, necessarily, and then everyone gets the even share.

It's just mainly the point is that anyone who is in need of God's people are cared for. That's the point, okay? So it's not Christian communism here that we're seeing. Anyway, Barnabas is an example of these different saints who sold property or brought money in some other form and gave it to the apostles to distribute to help people in their need.

And Ananias and Sapphira also got caught up in the spirit of this. But what we're gonna see is that their motives were different than Barnabas's and others, you know? Now, notice this little phrase that we see here in verse 35, 37, and then in chapter five, verse two, in 35, lay them at the apostles' feet, and 37, Barnabas brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet. And so Ananias wants to do the exact same thing.

He wants to put himself in the same situation where everyone's gonna see him come forward and do this same act of mercy. And so he also brings this money, not the full amount, but he brings this money and

lays it at the apostles' feet. Now, there's gotta be a purpose in Luke using this terminology three different times in this little section.

And it seems evident that he is making a dramatic contrast between Barnabas and these other saints with Ananias and Sapphira and the spirit that they were in. Let me read something the pulpit commentary wrote. The intention of the writer is to set in contrast the work of the spirit in Barnabas and the work of the devil in the hearts of Ananias and Sapphira, as also to show to us the relation of character and life to one another.

The blessing on those that obey the spirit, the curse on those that lie against the Holy Ghost and resist the will of God and his church. And really what we're seeing here are terrors in the field of God already, even at this early time, the field is flourishing, it's healthy. And who has done this thing? The man says in Jesus's parable, what is it, Matthew 13? And someone said, an enemy has done this.

And that's exactly what we see here. And the enemy is already bringing his agents into this close fellowship. We'll get into that a little bit more here in a minute.

Verse three, but Peter said, Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back some of the price of the land? This word filled, it's a Greek pleru, and it also is used in the sense of control or heavy influence. So maybe he could have been saying it this way, why have you allowed the father of lies to fill and control your heart? That's what's going on here. In fact, the pulpit commentary said, no man lies to his fellow men until he has first lied to the truth revealed within him.

And boy, that is the truth. You don't lie to other people until you first lie to yourself. And I said it in the Babylon book, I believe, that people believe lies because they want something.

They're wanting something that's being offered to them, and so they're willing to believe lies, but they believe lies also because they're living in a spirit of deception, and that's what was going on here. So now the reaction with Ananias is interesting. It wasn't fear, I don't think.

I don't think the fear of God came on him. In fact, I know it didn't. Ananias was full of himself, and if the fear of God would have come on him, he would have repented on the spot.

At that instant, he would have repented, and God would have forgave all. There's no way God would arbitrarily strike someone down. He could see what was going on in this man's heart.

It wasn't the fear of God. I believe he sat there as smugly as ever. The only reaction he had, I believe, was total humiliation, that he was exposed for what he was in in front of all these people he was trying to impress.

That's what I think his reaction was inside. Alexander McLaren says this, "Wherever there are signal instances "of Christian self-sacrifice, "there will spring up a crop of base copies." Okay, tears. "Ananias follows Barnabas "as surely as the shadow, the substance." It was very likely a pure impulse which led him and his wife to agree to sell their land, and it was only when they had the money in their hands and had to take the decisive step of parting with it that they found the surrender harder than they could carry out.

Why has Satan filled your heart? An awful antithesis to being filled with the Spirit. Then there is a real malign tempter who can pour evil affections and purposes into men's hearts, but he cannot do it unless the

man opens his heart, as that why implies. And then going on, he said, "Reverently, we may venture to say "that not only Christ stands at the door and knocks, "but that the enemy of him and his stands there too, "and he too enters, quote, if any man opens the door.

"Neither heaven nor hell can come in unless we will." And that is the truth, man. That explains a lot. Verse four, "While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? "And after it was sold, was it not under your control? "Why is it that you have conceived this deed in your heart? "You've not lied to men, but to God." And I started thinking about that word why, and make a great Bible study sometime.

I'll have to do that one of these days. But I looked it up. I knew something was sticking in my mind, and I breezed through some scriptures this morning.

I found the one I was thinking of. It was Jesus being quoted also by Luke then, in Luke 6, 46. And Jesus said to certain ones, he said, "'Why do you call me Lord, Lord, and do not do what I say?' He's asking a question that's like, I don't understand.

Help me to get this. Help me to understand. What's the motivation in this? Why are you doing this? Why are you in my body if you don't intend to follow me and to obey me? Why are you part of this? It would be better if you just went out.

And we'll get into that a little more here in a few minutes, how very true that is. Well, anyway, verse five. And as he heard these words, Ananias fell down and breathed his last, and great fear came over all who heard of it.

The young man got up and covered him up, and after carrying him out, they buried him. Now, they're elapsed. Oh, let me stop there.

No, I'll just keep going. Now, they're elapsed in an interval of about three hours, and his wife came in not knowing what had happened, and Peter responded to her. Tell me whether you sold the land for such and such a price.

And now he's setting her up here, but he's also giving her an opportunity to come clean, isn't he? Here it is, one last opportunity before the Holy Spirit strikes you dead. And you go straight to judgment and an eternity of damnation. Before that happens, in just a few seconds from now, I'm giving you an opportunity to be honest.

But she's out of it. She's full of herself. She's in her own thing.

She doesn't belong to the Lord. She's a plant. That's a whole new way of thinking of a terror, I guess.

Right? She's a, I couldn't say a church plant. I don't know if that fits, but it does kinda. The enemy planted her in there.

Anyway, her eternity is hanging on the balance and how she will respond. And you see it here. She said, yes, that was the price.

Wow. Wow. Man, frightening, frightening words.

Frightening words. Then Peter said to her, why, again, why is it that you have agreed together to put the spirit of the Lord to the test? Notice how Peter does not put himself in this story at all. This is between you

and God.

And I have seen that happen in this place so many times. Not to this degree of severity, but Jeff, you know what I'm talking about. We have seen it so many times with people that it's, you know, they think their problem is with the leadership, but their issue is not with the leadership, it's with God.

And the devil has masked the situation and lied to them and put something over their minds. And so all they can fixate on is the leaders and what, you know, louses we are, which is all true, of course, but that isn't the issue. The issue is between them and God.

And that's what the situation is here. Behold, the feet of those who have buried your husband are at the door and they will carry you out as well. Man.

And immediately she fell at his feet and breathed her last and the young men came in and found her dead and they carried her out and buried her beside her husband. In the meantime, while her body's sitting there, her soul is being, is flying away into eternity, probably escorted by a couple of demons or something, or maybe angels, I don't know how that works exactly, but that's the reality. If the Lord had chosen to show us in the spiritual realm what was also happening there, that's what was going on.

Let me read what the pulpit commentary wrote here. It's lengthy, but again, it's good and it's worth hearing. If you have notes, you can go along with them on the website or you that are here.

Satan was unusually busy with persecutions from without and temptations from within and his endeavors to hurt and corrupt the children of the kingdom. Excuse me. Indeed, we may notice as a universal feature in the economy of the kingdom of darkness, that every great step in advance of the kingdom of light is followed by some corresponding movement intended to defeat it.

The sowing of the good seed is the signal for the sowing of the terrors. The salvation of God is confronted with some counterfeit of Satan. The faith of God's elect was opposed, even in the first century, by subtle heresies of man's or Satan's devising.

And that is true, that every time God does something, you can count on it. In fact, Jeff and Rose and Kathy and I were talking last week. Okay, now I wonder how Satan's gonna come at us this time.

What's gonna be the attack? Because we were all fully expecting the Lord to come this weekend and he did, didn't he? Tremendously in two settings. The event in town and my birthday sermon here Sunday. Wow, both times God came magnificently in two different ways but powerfully and sure enough, right on the heels came the attacks.

And I won't get off into that but it always happens that way. It's a good sign, it means that the enemy is stirred up and upset. Okay, let's continue.

The great enemy of man could not look on the blessedness of the company of Christians without trying to mar it. He must have some portion, even within the enclosure of Christ's church. Even there, all must not be guileless truth.

All must not be unselfish love. He must have some to do him service even though they called Christ their Lord. But how could he find an entrance into those holy precincts? There are those who covet the praise and high esteem which virtue conciliates to itself.

And in religious society, they perceive that certain actions are praised by men and bring certain pleasurable consequences to the doers of them. These fruits of goodness they desire to possess but when they will not make the sacrifices, suffer the losses, endure the privations which are inseparable from such actions. The double heart immediately casts about or looks about to find some method of obtaining the good without making the sacrifice.

To be thought righteous, good, religious but not really to be so becomes the aim and object. Fraud, deceit, lies, false pretenses are called in to help and the hypocrite stands, kneels, gives alms, talks religiously by the side of God's true saints till his hypocrisy is brought to light and he stands revealed as a dissembler before God and man. But meanwhile, in the side of the world, true godliness is discredited by each fresh exposure of the hypocrite.

That is just so heartbreaking. And that is what we see an overwhelming measure in the church today. Man.

All right. Verse 11 through 18, we have here another summary and I'll blow through it real quick but I'll touch on it also here before I get done. And great fear came over the whole church and over all who heard of these things.

At the hands of the apostles, many signs and wonders were taking place among the people and they were all with one accord in Solomon's portico but none of the rest dared to associate with them. However, the people held them in high esteem and all the more believers in the Lord, multitudes of men and women were constantly added to their number to such an extent that they even carried the sick out into the streets and laid them on cots and pallets so that when Peter came by, at least his shadow might fall on any one of them. Also the people from the cities in the vicinity of Jerusalem were coming together, bringing people who were sick or afflicted with unclean spirits and they were all being healed.

But here it is what we were just talking about. Here it is. But the high priest rose up along with all his associates that is the sect of the Sadducees and they were filled with jealousy and we know who poured it into their hearts, don't we? And they put them in jail.

Now, you know, this term rose up is very interesting because it, again, it shows how the enemy responds when God is moving. We wonder why the enemy attacks us in this place? It's because God is doing tremendous things in men's lives. He's snatching men out of the kingdom of darkness and Satan hates us for it.

You know, and here's what the enemy does is he pours something vile into people's hearts who he can use, whether they call themselves Christians or not, whether they're outside the church or inside the church, this is how the enemy always operates. This is how he does it. He puts something into someone and that compels them to rise up.

Well, what does rise up mean? Rise up in pride, of course. It's the opposite of taking a humble and meek spirit towards the Lord, isn't it? Number 16, Korah, Dathan and their followers rose up against Moses. In 1 Chronicles 21, Satan rose up against Israel.

In Luke 4, the people of Nazareth rose up against Jesus. In Acts 6, which we'll get into next week, the Jews rose up against Stephen. In Acts 16, a Philippian mob rose up against Paul and Silas.

And in Acts 18, the Jews in Corinth rose up against Paul. You know, so we see the same thing happening. God using someone and the enemy using his people to attack God's work.

All right, verse 19. But during the night, the apostles are all in jail, okay? And it's very interesting to me. You know, later on, we'll get to the story of 1 Peter, the same thing happens again, only to him next time.

And we'll get more detail that time. There's not much detail offered in this one, this jailbreak, but let's read it. But during the night, an angel of the Lord opened the gates of the prison, and taking them out, he said, go stand and speak to the people in the temple the whole message of this life.

You know, and I think about what Jesus said. My words are spirit and life, all right? And that's what these disciples, they were full of the Holy Ghost and fire, and when they would go out and preach, man, it just, the power of God was in the air. And the words of life came to people.

And they had to make a choice if they were going to submit themselves to the demands of the gospel and humble themselves, or were they going to turn away in rebellion? That's what was going on there. So now I'm not gonna read this next section, 21 through 32. Basically, the Sanhedrin sent out their guards to get the disciples and bring them back, and they brought them back into the council room, whatever it was, the hall.

And, you know, well, verse 28, the high priest said to them, we gave you strict orders not to teach this way anymore. But look at Peter's response in verse 29. We must obey God rather than men.

And it's very reminiscent, someone pointed this out, one of the commentators, about Luther standing before that Catholic synod in Worms, and he made that statement. Man, what a powerful statement, because considering his situation, he said, here I stand, I can do no other, God help me. You know, he just, this is meekness.

It's a fierce courage to stand in the face of opposition and persecution, unflinchingly refusing to back down one inch, but doing it in a humble spirit. That's meekness. And that's what Peter was in here, a little bit different than a few months before when he lopped off the guy's ear with a sword, and then he went running for his life.

You got problems, Peter. He needed the Holy Spirit like we do, right? So, you know, verses 33 through 40, Gamaliel is probably, well, most certainly, the leading Pharisee alive during that time. And I'll just say a couple things real briefly about Gamaliel.

He was, of course, Saul's mentor, right? Right then, during this time, Saul is being taught by him and so on. And Gamaliel was either the son, they can't quite figure it out, either the son or the grandson of Hillel. There were two great bodies of Pharisees.

They were kind of split over some doctrinal issues. You know, it'd be kind of like the Arminianists and Calvinists maybe or something, I don't know. But in the Phariseic party, there were two branches.

One was Shammai, I think is the name of the one guy and his followers, and the other was Hillel. And right now, it's not coming to me what their differences were. But anyway, Gamaliel was the son or grandson of Hillel, and so he was the leader of that group.

And he, in Jewish history, he was very highly thought of. In fact, I have a quote here somewhere. Oh yeah, this is what they say about him.

The Mishnah says, when Rabban, that means rabbi, Gamaliel died, the glory of the law ceased, and purity and abstinence died. That's how much veneration the Jews in later years had for him. Not the Sadducees, but the Pharisees, who continued on after the temple was destroyed and so on.

Sadduceism was done with when the temple was destroyed. But anyway, I'm getting off track. So here we have Gamaliel stands up, and he's got all his Pharisees in that Sanhedrin.

And he basically lays out this situation, and he says, look, just let this thing go as it will. Remember, the Pharisees were still kind of half on board with the church at this early stage. They weren't dead set against it like the Sadducees were.

Everything the church spoke, taught, and represented was against what the Sadducees believed. But it wasn't so with the Pharisees. They were still grappling with these things, you know? And so there wasn't that animosity.

It did come later, but at this point early on, that hostility wasn't there, and the Pharisees were still open to what these men were saying and so on. And so Gamaliel basically says, listen, if this is of the Lord, it's going to work out. And if it's not, it's, you know, if it, wait a minute, what am I saying? If this is of the Lord, you're gonna end up fighting against the Lord.

It's right here in verse 39. Let's just read it. It's been a long night, okay? If it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them, or else you may even be found fighting against God.

And you know, and he said, but if it's not of the Lord, it'll die out, so don't worry about it. And so basically, they beat the disciples and told them, don't teach this way anymore, and cut them loose. But it is interesting that you see the separation between the early church and Judaism is growing further and further apart.

You know, it's still early, and the paths aren't that far apart at this point. You know, the Pharisees are still kind of half on board with them, but it's starting to separate more and more. And you will see in the days ahead that Judaism goes way off track, you know? And their rejection of the Messiah continues and takes them into the spiritual abyss that is there to this day, 2,000 years later, all that the Jews have gone through because they rejected the Messiah, you know? But you see it, them going off track, while at the same time, the church grows stronger and starts flourishing across the Roman Empire in the years and decades to follow.

Let me read what Albert Barnes said regarding this comment of Gamaliel, you cannot overthrow it. "The prediction of Gamaliel has been fulfilled. "People have opposed Christianity in every way "but in vain.

"They have reviled it, have persecuted it, "have resorted to argument and to ridicule, "to fire and sword. "They have called in the aid of science, "but all has been in vain." You know, it just reminds me of, what's this man's name, Richard Hawkins? Is that his name, the scientist? I saw a headline in the news yesterday that he has an organization, how to help Christian pastors renounce Christianity and become atheists. It's actual organization that he has put together to help bring that about.

But it won't go anywhere. The only people he's gonna get off track are terrorists in the first place, and good riddance, get out. We don't want you in the church anyway.

Go ahead. But that's, you know, that's the way it's always been. Let me continue reading.

"The more it has been crushed, the more it has risen, "and it still exists with as much life and power as ever. "The preservation of this religion amidst so much "and so varied opposition proves that it is of God. "No severe trial can await it "than it has already experienced, "and it has survived so many storms and trials.

"We have every evidence that, according to the predictions, "it is destined to live and to fill the world." Yeah, man, isn't that the truth? All right, now, with our remaining few minutes, I wanna touch on something here. It's basically a question I'm gonna pose to you, but to set it up, I want to contrast with you the high priest, which actually is two of them. There's Annas, who's the real power behind the high priestly family, and Caiaphas, his son-in-law, who is the high priest at this time.

Okay, so I wanna compare these two men with Ananias and Sapphira. Now, consider this. Just think about this.

All this that I'm gonna talk about happens in this short period of time here. Annas and his son-in-law, Caiaphas, were directly responsible with the horrible murder of God's son. Man, what a thing to take into eternity.

They arrested Peter and John when they healed the cripple. They arrested and beat the disciples in this chapter, the story we're reading about. In the next story, they condoned the murder of Stephen.

Then they encouraged Saul to persecute the rest of the church through beatings, imprisonment, and perhaps death. And they probably were behind Herod executing the apostle James. They did all of that.

They were the driving force behind all of that devilish hatred and malice towards God's people. Now, that's on their side, and I want you to compare their list of crimes, all of that malignancy, and look at what Ananias and Sapphira did. They lied.

They told one lie, and they were struck down instantly. Where is the justice? How do you reconcile that? All right, and that's what I wanna leave you with is an answer to that question, and I'll just, it's kind of a two-part answer here about what the Lord was doing, why He struck down Ananias and Sapphira. First of all, He was establishing the fear of the Lord in His infant church.

It was so important that this become established right in the beginning, because the fear of the Lord is like a barrier that keeps you from going astray in your thinking. It keeps you from rising up. There isn't a proud person alive that has the fear of the Lord in them.

It keeps you from getting into sin. It keeps you from introducing heresy or even thinking heretically. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, isn't it? It's such a vital part of Christianity.

And you know, the opposite of the fear of the Lord is what? Self-will, self-love. It's the whole self-life. You know, when self becomes huge in your thinking and in your attitudes and all that you do in life, it's all done through the filter of what's in it for me and how does it make me look and all of that kind of junk.

But when you are full of yourself, God becomes very tiny, as I've preached elsewhere. And when God is tiny, you're not gonna fear a tiny God that's over on a mountaintop somewhere, you know, 100 miles away or something. He's not gonna be fearful to you.

You're not gonna be all that concerned about crossing him or disobeying him or displeasing him or getting him angry or any of it. You know, the fear of the Lord is vital. It's a vital part of a healthy church.

The Pope of commentary said, the beginning of wisdom is not found in keen insight. Well, this is, I would just like to take this statement and broadcast it on every Christian radio station in the country. The beginning of wisdom is not found in keen insight nor wide experience, nor the learning of the schools, but in the temper of reverence and awe.

And that comes about at Calvary. When you allow God to deal with your rebellious nature and your sinfulness and your attitudes and all of it, when you allow God to deal with you, that's where that fear of God is established inside you. And you humble yourself at his feet and you tell him, God, whatever you desire, I will obey you.

The fear of the finite in the presence of the infinite of the sinful in the presence of the holy. That's the fear of the Lord. That's where wisdom comes from.

And that's one of the reasons why the church is in such a mess today is because the fear of the Lord is not there. There are whole denominations that have made it their cause to exterminate any semblance of the fear of God amongst their people. All under the name of grace, it's all a lie.

Another person said this, self-love is precisely the opposite of reverence. It is the absence of the spirit that looks up to anything above us. It is the spirit that leads one to say in his heart, I am the greatest and the best.

Man, that's the devil. That is the devil right there. But it is in a lot of Christians' hearts.

I say Christian loosely. All right, now I wanna read something the expositor's commentary said. It was a stern action indeed, but then all God's judgments have a stern side.

Ananias and Sapphira were cut off in their sins, but men are every day summoned into eternity in precisely the same state and the same way. And the only difference is that in the case of Ananias, we see the sin which provoked the punishment, and then we see the punishment immediately following. Men object to this narrative simply because they have a one-sided conception of Christianity.

They would make it a religion of pure, unmitigated love. They would eliminate from it every trace of sternness and would thus leave it a poor, weak, flabby thing without backbone or earnestness and utterly unlike all other dispensations of the Lord which have their stern sides and aspects as well as their loving. That's balance right there.

That's balance, the balance of the cross, the love of God and the judgment of God, the severity of God against sinners and sin and so on. So, you know, why did God strike these two down? First of all, to establish the fear of the Lord, and you see it in verse 11. That's exactly what happened.

Great fear came over the whole church and over all who heard of these things. The other thing is that there is just a spiritual dynamic in the kingdom of God. It takes it out of the arbitrary sense.

It's more of just a basic, here's the way things operate in this kingdom, just like there's laws of gravity and so on. This is one of the laws of the kingdom, that the closer you come to God and the things of God, the more serious the ramifications are. And, you know, I devise these summary statements.

I'm gonna go through them just real briefly. They're in your notes there or online. You can see them there in the notes.

What I did was the summary statement at the end of chapter two, and the one at the end of chapter four, and the one in the middle of chapter five. What Luke did during these summary statements, he's basically kind of saying the same sorts of things. He's just writing down a bunch of phrases that are describing different aspects of the church.

So what I did in this little notes section here is I lumped them together. In other words, I took statements about fear out of chapter two and chapter five. I took statements about fellowship and unity out of chapter two and chapter four, so on.

And I just like it because you can see it. These are just bare scripture statements here. There's nothing of myself or anyone else.

This is what the word of God says. For instance, signs and wonders, the last one down at the bottom, which comes out of Acts 2.43, 5.12, and then 5.15 and 16. Let me just read these statements real quick.

And many wonders and signs were taking place through the apostles. At the hands of the apostles, many signs and wonders were taking place among the people, and they were all with one accord in Solomon's portico. They even carried the sick out into the streets and laid them on cots and pallets, so that when Peter came by, at least his shadow might fall on any one of them.

Also, the people from the cities in the vicinity of Jerusalem were coming together, bringing people who were sick or afflicted with unclean spirits, and they were all being healed. Okay, so this summary here of these, actually this compiling of these three summary statements shows the atmosphere of the church at this early time. Jesus was all in all.

His presence was felt everywhere. His power was being manifested, you know, on a continuous basis. This is the atmosphere that people are living in.

You know, and when you are living in that intensity of God's presence, the stakes are much higher. They become much higher. In fact, let me say it like this.

Let's say that under a normal dead church situation, which is most of America now, you know, when you go to judgment, okay, well, you heard the gospel, but you didn't really see it. You know, there wasn't much power, hardly at all. You didn't really feel God's presence and all that stuff.

But compare that to a time like this, or like the Hebrides revival to a lesser degree, or other times like that, everything gets ramped up. So the way that God can use you is tenfold, you know. He can use you in a mighty way, but also the consequences are tenfold.

The responsibility is tenfold. You know, God is there. He's there powerfully, and when He's there powerfully, you better respond to Him.

Now, I wouldn't put Pure Life Ministries on this level for sure, but I will definitely say that it's somewhere between the church that's out there now and this level. I don't know exactly where, but I do know God's presence is in this place. We just saw it manifested over the weekend in a powerful way, and that means that the responsibility upon us is greater, and it's fearful.

It should be fearful to you, but it should drive you to the Lord. You know, it should be a wonderful motivator to follow the Lord with all your heart. In the Old Testament, we saw this principle established.

It wasn't, you know, stated outright, but you saw it in different ways. You saw the psalmist like David or Asaph struggling with, well, why do the wicked, you know, prosper and your people suffer, and, you know, these kinds of musings and questions about God's ways, why? Why is Annas and Caiaphas given a, you know, a free pass, and you strike this couple down because they told one lie? You know, why? But it always comes out, yeah, but the difference is the degree of light that you were receiving. You know, that's the difference.

The same thing Habakkuk struggled with also, you know, the degree of light. The people of Israel had the oracles of God. They had the reality of God right there in the law.

The pagans, the Babylonians, the Amorites, the Syrians, those pagan nations didn't have the law, so they didn't have the same judgment. You know, facing them. In the New Testament, Jesus dealt with it straightforward in one time.

Luke 12, 47 and 48, and he was, I'm cutting into, you know, sort of a parable here, but he said, that slave who knew his master's will and did not get ready or act in accord with his will will receive many lashes, lashes, but the one who did not know it and committed deeds worthy of a flogging will receive but few. There it is, right there, that's the principle. And then he goes on, he finishes it up with this.

From everyone who has been given much, and dear ones, you've been given a lot in this place. You're responsible. God wants to give you so much more.

He wants to give you all of himself. From everyone who has been given much, much will be required. That can be taken in a positive way, or if there's sin in your life, you better fear.

You should fear. And to whom they entrusted much of him, they will ask all the more. Yeah, you know, it's a blessing.

It doesn't scare me in a certain way. Well, I guess it does a little bit. Actually, it does a lot.

It does. But I say it doesn't scare me because I see God's grace on my life. I know that, you know, that there is a clean relationship there and that I want to do his will, and he knows that.

Another statement that is kind of along the same lines James would make later on, he said, let not many of you become teachers, my brethren, knowing that as such, we will incur a stricter judgment. You want to teach, just make sure that your life is clean and that you are really obeying the Lord. You know, I tell you, I tremble thinking about people in the church today who just are out there doing their own things full of themselves, full of false confidence in what they think they know, and they know very little, really.

So what happened here at this stage? God is working to cleanse his church. You know, that's what's happening here. And he's bringing a new reverential fear into the body of Christ.

And it's a wonderful, wonderful thing. Lord, I thank you for this dynamic that's at work in your kingdom, that you do judge. And it's not that this judgment was any harsher than what goes on daily, people leaving this planet and standing before you in judgment that's eternal.

We think this is harsh or something maybe because people are struck down in the middle of their life, but that's nothing compared to what they faced in the eternal. And Lord, I pray that you would make these things real to us. Make us fear you in the proper way, Lord, a reverential awe that is based in love and adoration and devotion to you, but also a fear of the consequences of going astray, of going our own way, of rising up in pride, of rebelling against your authority.

Help us, Lord, to think right and put that guard around us, we pray. In the name of Jesus, amen. God bless you.

God bless you.

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