

On Mission with God, p2

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Take your Bible and go to the book of Acts and let's continue and complete what we began last time and we are taking a little interlude from our preaching through the book of Amos, first of all, to look at this strong foundational truth about what the church is and about how we're to function as his church and then, of course, Sunday morning next week, my Easter Sunday message and then, Lord willing, we will resume our study in Amos. Hasn't Amos been rich, by the way?

Acts 5 as we come to a point in Acts where, I believe, God has, at this point, laid down the blueprint, if you will, of what every church is to be about in every generation. We come to Acts 5, beginning in verse 1 and we'll go through verse 14.

1 But a man named Ananias, with his wife Sapphira, sold a piece of property, 2 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. 3 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? 4 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 have not lied to men but to God." 5 And as he heard these words, Ananias fell down and breathed his last; and great fear came over all who heard of it. 6 The young men got up and covered him up, and after carrying him out, they buried him. 7 Now there elapsed an interval of about three hours, and his wife came in, not knowing what had happened. 8 And Peter responded to her, "Tell me whether you sold the land for such and such a price?" And she said, "Yes, that was the price." 9 Then Peter said to her, "Why is it that you have agreed together to put the Spirit of the Lord to the test? Behold, the feet of those who have buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out as well." 10 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. 11 And great fear came over the whole church, and over all who heard of these things. 12 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. 13 But none of the rest dared to associate

with them; however, the people held them in high esteem. 14 And all the more believers in the Lord, multitudes of men and women, were constantly added to their number,

I've entitled this "On Mission with God." God has a grand and glorious purpose that he unfolds progressively through the Scriptures. In the Old Testament you have it contained, in the New Testament it's explained and even exclaimed. In the Old Testament it is somewhat concealed, that's why the Bible uses the word "mystery" often. You couldn't see exactly how it was going to unfold, it was concealed but in the New Testament it's revealed. Well, what is this great overarching plan that God has? This is it: that God will save for himself a people and they will be his called out ones. The word "church, ekklesia," means "called out ones." No longer would they be exclusively people who belonged to a fallen sinful world, they would be called out from that and become the set apart, exclusive people of God, and they would be God's people that they might know him, treasure him, love him, and enjoy him for both time and eternity but there were aspects about it that folks just didn't know for so many centuries, and then Jesus came and he died on the cross. Remember it took the apostles a while to grasp that it took the death of the Messiah. He wasn't going to initially just set up a kingdom, it took his death on the cross to pay for our sins to qualify us in righteousness to be the children of God. Then, of course, he rose for our justification, then he ascended to heaven and there he ever intercedes at the right hand for his own children.

Then you come to the book of Acts, Christ is in heaven and the Spirit comes in a special unique way – now listen – to empower, to energize this church age, this age of grace that we presently live in, and now starting in Acts, we begin to see just how God intends for this to unfold or to work or to function and that's why I want to camp here in Acts for a couple of weeks. Nothing new to those of you who have been around a while, but just to reaffirm this is what we are about because this is what God is about. This is how God intends to do this work during the church age of saving for himself this people and we want to make sure – listen now – that we are on mission with God. We are not blasphemously going to ask God to build our church and we are not arrogantly going to tell God how we're going to build his church. We're going to do what he said he would do when he told Peter, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God," he said, "Upon this rock I will build my church." And we just want to get in on it with God. That's our quest. That's why we exist.

Now, it doesn't fit the flow of this modern professing church age and the spirit and the philosophies of "how to do church." I sort of detest that whole phrase and it's a very common phrase among pastors and pastors conferences and conferences for church leaders about this how you do church in this age. What do you mean, how you do church? You don't do church, you are church. We do what our Lord, the head of the church, tells us to do and that hasn't changed for 2,000 years. We don't get to manipulate – now listen to me – we don't get to manipulate, toy with or mess with his bride. I don't want you messing with my bride, you'd better not, and he doesn't want us messing with his bride, amen? Every man ought to understand that well.

So when you look at the book of Acts and then the living out of the truths that were foundationally laid in the book of Acts, you have, I think what I have depicted here in this illustration, of a wheel. You have as the centerpiece of the church doing her work is the preaching of the word. That's why it's centered. That's why it's the hub of the wheel. Everything comes off of that. And then building off of the great doctrines and methodologies that come out of faithful Spirit-anointed preaching of the word you find there's three basic things church members are to be involved in: small group ministries, or we call that every member ministry through small groups. We're always striving to challenge, lead, encourage, exhort every church member to have some role of loving, encouraging, discipling, helping one another through a small group setting because if you don't organize into small groups, most of you will fall through the cracks and we see small groups clearly taught in the book of Acts.

Missions. Well, the whole book of the book of Acts is about world missions, Paul being sent out, going into all of the world. So we call this a personalized strategic world missions ministry. But what do we do in missions? How do we do missions? What is our message? What are the mandates about how missions is to work? We find out from the preaching of the word of God. So the preaching of the word is always centered.

So every member in a ministry through a small group, personalized strategic world missions and then the bottom spoke, what we call family discipleship. Now, the New Testament does not give us hardly any specifics on how to do this other than just make it real, moms and dads. You study your small group lesson, you study the word as it is being preached, you memorize some Scripture, you think about the truths of it and just let it be resonating in the home and as you go along the way, as you go on vacation. So family discipleship is a key spoke also.

Now, there are a lot of subpoints to all of these. We don't have time to go over all of this. Many, many hours I could give you on all of that but if we are doing those well and doing those with our whole heart, we've got a lot to do. There's not a lot of room for other stuff. That's why when I hear all of this stuff churches are doing, "Well, we're doing this and this and this and this," I don't want to say, "Well, what about the main things, are those being done?" And the answer almost every time is, "No, they're not." Well, here's what I want to say: until you get this right, don't do anything else and don't start doing other stuff and neglecting this. You just would not believe the pulpits on this Sunday in America that are going to get a weak, watered-down, barren of passion and conviction, radically unbiblical message and one of the main reasons why is they've asked their pastor to do everything but the main thing, prepare to preach the word in the power of the Spirit. Everything depends on that because those spokes get their instructions on how they're to function from the word.

Then the outside rim of the wheel, the local church doing God's work in the world and it must have Spirit empowerment. Just can't say enough about that. Spirit empowerment.

Now we move on. That's somewhat of the introduction and we go to I. and this is review and we begin to outline that as the church matures, there will be an unending and even

deepening cycling of these five principles. Are you with me? As the church is rolling along, there will be an ever deepening and never ending, at least until the day Christ returns it's not going to end, cycling through of these principles. Now, our experience is and I believe the New Testament would bear this out well, as a church matures, these are not difficult or traumatic or as wrenching and troubling as they were when you first started doing them if your church was not doing them, but as you begin to walk in these, you begin to greatly glory in God's wisdom to give us these precepts, these principles.

Alright, the first one is the purification of the church. This is review and we have here the church just getting started and it is going gang-busters. I mean, it's going great. Magnanimous "the success" the church was having. I mean, thousands, tens of thousands, perhaps hundreds of thousands at least seemingly to come to faith in Christ. Now, by this point chronologically, I can't say that many but it's going great. Good things are happening and then right in the middle of this, God shuts the revival down, God shuts evangelism down, God shuts everything down to deal with sin, hypocrisy or impurity in the church. You and I would not have done that. We would have said, "Well, ignore that little sin issue. Don't worry about that. Man, this thing's going great. Have you seen the numbers?" God says, "You don't understand something, I'm not about numbers. You can play with your numbers idolatry all you want, I am about holiness." Now, trust me, God is about both but not numbers at the expense of holiness.

So he interjects here for us this strong, powerful, foundational principle of purification in his church. Trust me, everything God owns and everything God does, he purifies. That's why by the time this whole church age ends and we'll be called up together with the Lord and he'll have established a new heaven and a new earth and everything will be glorified, it's going to be 100% holy as he is holy. But we are to be his people called out from a fallen sinful world so that we walk in that principle, now never in perfection, but we must be, as a church family and as individual believers, continual repenters and never embracing or rejoicing in that which our Lord calls impure or ungodly.

Now, here's what happens to me studying this: I start feeling guilty. I start being humbled. "Lord, I'm not pure yet. I'm not fully set apart yet. How can I preach this?" And the Lord reminds me, "No, but in me you are and also I'm giving you the grace to humble yourself and keep being a repentor and a striver after purity." Someone has said one time, "Well, the church is the place for sinners." It is not. The church is the place for repenting sinners. There's a huge difference between the two. We never justify or condone accommodating impurities. I'm talking about known, willful, open, brazen walking in sin. We never accommodate that to the end of reaching lost souls. That's backwards. That's upside down. That's radically blasphemous because our God is holy. That's why he shut evangelism down to deal with impurity.

Then this text says not only did God kill Ananias and Sapphira, and remember their sin was when they brought their gift, it wasn't because they didn't bring everything they got from the sale of their properties, that wasn't mandated or required, this was voluntary, this was a voluntary type offering for a limited time for a special need. This is not the pattern of the church in all ages. Now, we may enter a day like that when under such persecution

we may feel voluntarily led by the Lord to do that, but that's all this was, but Ananias and Sapphira came in parading and promoting as if they, like others, were bringing it all when actually they kept back some of the price. So, look, they were using. Whatever else – are you listening to your pastor – whatever else the church is for, it's for the glory of God and Ananias and Sapphira in premeditated guile was using the church for their own gain and their own glory and God in effect was saying at the start of the church age, "My Spirit is being poured out. That kind of hypocrisy must be cut out for me to have the kind of pure church I can bless and use."

Here's the thing to think about, are you listening? If God hadn't dealt with that kind of impurity at the very beginning, the church would have been weakened and polluted and the Gospel may have never gotten to our forefathers who got it to us. Are you listening, church? Do you not understand that this principle was key to us, the succeeding generations, getting the Gospel? How are we doing for the next generations that follow us?

The purification of the church. That's review. II. The unification of the church. The unification of the church. So, first of all, the purification of the church is a principle that we will cycle through regularly. Now, as we work with church plants and churches that want to be revitalized to be biblically healthy, we are finding – listen – without exception they go through several purification purges in the life of their church and it's devastating and it's difficult and these pastors, it's so hard, and that's why I tell you when they come here to visit and we're trying to get one couple a month to come and stay a while just to give them some respite, just to visit a service and chill out a while, but when these pastors come our way at the conference through the year, please love them, please encourage them because they're dying, a lot of them. I mean, their lives are broken and hurting because they're really trying to bring the church back to these biblical precepts and a lot of people oppose them. By the way, a lot of people are very very evil and angry and mean-spirited in their opposition. So it's a tough thing they go through, church leaders and church members, but particularly the leadership seems to be the one that gets the focus of most of the brunt of it, but as these cycles go on, it gets to be much of a smaller thing and the church has seen God bless the principles and so the support is raised greatly with in the church.

Now, unification flows out of this commitment to be a true church or a biblically healthy church also. Look at it there, if you will, in verse 12 of Acts 5, "At the hands of the apostles many signs and wonders were taking place among the people," here it is, "and they were all with one accord in Solomon's portico." So all of their individual hearts had been purified as they saw what God did to Ananias and Sapphira. So there was a new level of repentance, a new level of, "Let's deal with the sin in our own lives," a new level of focusing on Christ and on God's glory – now listen – that always results in unity. Repentance and humbling of individual members results in the unity of the corporate membership. So what we're seeing here in Acts 5 is they're all in one accord, they're all unified, is a true, genuine, holy, Spirit-wrought unity and, my friend, there is nothing like it on the face of the earth. When the Spirit of God brings God's people together, it's beautiful beyond compare.

The Bible says in Psalm 133:1, "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is For brothers to dwell together in unity!" Jesus said in his high priestly prayer interceding for his church, John 17:23, "I in them and You in Me, that they may be perfected in unity, so that the world may know that You sent Me, and loved them, even as You have loved Me." Now, perfected in unity, Jesus says. What he means is as they are matured, then a true spiritual unity will be their reality and then the world will look at that unity they have and the world will say, "How do they do that?" and they'll have to give God the glory. God must be doing that. I mean, you couldn't get this bunch together for anything else, maybe for a silly athletic event somewhere but then you'd fight over that. I mean, there's nothing else that would bring us together but that in sweet Holy Spirit-wrought unity.

So the world looks at this and the world marvels because our unity marks us and there are no strongholds of malice and no strongholds of slander, no strongholds of envy or jealousy, no strongholds of strife, no strongholds of contentions and bitterness and divisions. Now, would we be exaggerating to say that most Baptists and evangelical congregations find those type things very common in their fellowship? Instead of it being something that might pop up but is repented of and taken care of? That's normal. That's going to happen are pop ups of this stuff but in most Baptist and evangelicals I don't think I'm exaggerating, this is just the way they do church business. It's mob rule. Whoever can stir up the most factions and contentions and get people to their side and get the votes, they get their way no matter what the Bible says. These are so commonplace. Too many congregations today know nothing of the unity of the Spirit.

Now, the key principle here about this unity is that the Holy Spirit is the third person of the Godhead and he's of the truth and he's pure and any congregation that makes little or no effort to stand and function in purity and truth grieves the Holy Spirit so he departs. When you deny the truth of the what the Bible says about this and you deny the quest and the striving for a holiness or a purity in God's church, the Spirit of God who you are radically and wholly dependent upon to build the church, leaves as far as being there to empower you to do God's work. And as I said in the earlier message, then what are you left with? If God's Spirit is not building it, then you come up with all these silly, nonsensical entertainments, amusements, fads and gimmicks. There are churches in the Shoals area today that are actually promoting drinking booze and smoking cigars to get people to come to their Bible studies. Brothers and sisters, that is the wrong track to be on because he's pure. He's the Holy Spirit.

Philippians 2:3 reminds us, "Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves." Now, listen to me, there is no way you can do that unless the Spirit of God has changed your heart and he keeps you humble. That's it. I can't do any kind of special slick thing or approach or be sweet and kind and meek and loving or whatever, enough to keep all of you happy and all of us in harmony. The Spirit of God has to do that. You see, only the Spirit can bring each individual believer to a humble and contrite view of themselves. Only the Spirit can bring an individual believer to a humble and contrite view of themselves. Then when he's done that, it enables us to love with a special deep love for our brothers and sisters in

Christ who also have a humble and contrite estimate of themselves. Then you put all those type folks together and they have a supernatural unity.

Now, the world doesn't understand that. Well, I'll tell you what, I don't know if I'd go along with that. But do you know what? When you're deeply aware of your own shortcomings before a holy God, you're just so very willing to let 1,001 offenses just go by and say, "I'm not going to be offended by that. I'm not going to make an issue out of that. It just don't matter." Now, if they deny the inspiration of the Scripture or the deity of Christ, we'll meet with somebody and talk about that, amen? But all this other stuff that doesn't matter, we just decided in Grace Life Church it just doesn't matter.

You know, in one real sense – listen to me – in the church we do not strive for unity. You do not strive for unity. The world does that. Look at the political scene today, isn't there a striving, "Can we not get together?" No, we won't get together. Do you know why we're not going to get together? Because when a country leaves its Judeo-Christian ethic and it brings in other philosophies and other religions, all of those philosophies or religions by their very nature are in contradiction with each other. It can't work. Their morals are different from our morals. Their values are different from our values. Their principles are different from our principles. Now, it sounds wonderful and open and globalistic and we'll all be one big happy world community holding hands together and singing, "Kumbayah," but I have a hard time holding hands and singing "Kumbayah" with somebody who says my Lord was a bastard child, is not the Savior of the world. So they can keep pushing it all they want, at the end of the day it's just going to be whoever is the most powerful wins the day and everybody else will be crushed into oppression and silence.

My point is the world's trying for this unity. Look, we don't strive for unity, what we're to strive for is truth. That's the difference in the church. We don't strive for unity, we strive for truth and then unity results. For truth, we'll go to war but once we are committed to the same truth together, unity naturally results. Jesus said this in Matthew 10:34, he said, "I did not come to bring peace, but I came to bring a sword." What did he mean? Here's what he meant, he said, "You folks I'm preaching to are under this backslidden, unbiblical, Judaistic system of religion and it's not of the truth and I come bearing the truth so we're going to be in conflict from the very beginning. Until you get right with truth, we're not going to have unity." But as Christian people, we can agree on what the major doctrines and the major practices as revealed in the Scriptures are for the church and we can all unite to that truth and then we're all one in unity.

It's an old illustration. Everybody's heard it, but it's still a very good and true illustration. When somebody tunes a piano, they don't tune a piano to another piano, they tune every piano to one tuning fork and all those individual pianos tuned to that fork will all sound the same. The word of God is our tuning fork that we're committed to and if we had so many many many many of these, it would be hard for you to pick out which one. But a man came to me one time and a group was leaving us and he opened his Bible and he told the man, "Where are the clear violations of Scripture?" And the man who was leaving said, "I don't know of any." He said, "Well, I'm not going anywhere," because we're tuned

into this and if this is right, I'm in. I have to get over my personal presuppositions and my personal preferences.

It's been kind of funny as we're doing all this work around here, you know, and a lot of you would have done different stuff than what's been done but you haven't made an issue of it because it's not about that. Any church that sets aside truth "for the sake of unity" has committed high treason against Jesus Christ. As Christians, our unity is not marbles in a bag, our unity is more like chunks of chocolate in a double boiler blending together and this is why we will always from time to time have those we thought who were with us, who we thought loved us and then they abruptly just leave us. Lots of time they're just gone one day. Now, we have very little of that but it does happen. Now, I'm not speaking about everyone who leaves. God leads some people other places and they leave in a Christian manner and for the glory of God, but perhaps more than we would like to admit, people leave because over time it becomes clear that God has not given them a humble and contrite spirit to get over themselves and they fit better somewhere else. The Bible teaches the indefectability of the elect. Let me say that again: the Bible teaches the indefectability of the elect. To defect means to desert a cause to embrace another. If God has really saved you, the Spirit of God has really convicted you and you're really born again of the Spirit, there is something in you that so clings to other brothers and sisters who have also had that new experience that no matter what might try to separate you, you just can't defect from that bond.

Here's the point: why don't you get bent out of sorts over things that really don't matter? There is a good verse here, Proverbs 18:1 says, "He who separates himself seeks his own desire, He quarrels against all sound wisdom." When you're not humbled and God-centered, then your own desires become chief. I heard just recently that a new kind of church has come to the Shoals area and they're doing it a different way and it's really exciting and I've heard churches are having a lot of members leave them and go to this new kind of church and I know for a fact some of these people since I've been in the Shoals are on their fifth and sixth church change because it's about them, not about being anchored in truth.

My question is: why do you hang in there? Why do you stay there? Why don't you get so amused or bent out of shape and do these things? Why do you lovingly forgive and believe the best about your small group leader or your pastor when they may say something or teach something that troubles you a little bit? Why do you stay loyal to your covenant commitment to this local church? Or if you can't get over something, why do you go quickly and humbly and confidentially to that brother or sister and work it out and then go on and serve God faithfully beside them in the church? Why didn't you start a movement? Why didn't you start a faction in the church to parade your cause or your viewpoint? Why didn't you pack up your family and go somewhere else? Why? Because you're of special stuff? No. Because in grace you're a Spirit-born again child of God and that enables you to humble yourself and get over it and get through it and stay together for God's glory.

There is nothing that can separate the truly Spirit-born, Christ-saved elect from loving and bonding with one another because it's not about you and it's not about me. If God leads one to another fellowship, God does that but you can be sure they will leave the right way. They will not leave abruptly spewing a bunch of unbiblical or extra-biblical grievances or offenses and they will not leave to join a clearly unbiblical fellowship. Those that leave us in that way – listen, here's what I want you to get, chapter 5, Ananias and Sapphira – those that leave that way, it's not so much them leaving the church as God removing them from the church.

The point: all of this occurs because God removes. He purifies. Now, you be careful when you pick out the next person that needs to be purged out. They won't be the one. It'll be that sister that you thought was really solid. It'll be that brother that you thought he'd go to war for the truth. What has your pastor told you a million times? What exposes what's really there? I usually spell it: t-i-m-e. Ananias and Sapphira made it for a while but after a while what they treasured and they loved was not Christ but themselves. Unfortunately you can go to a lot of congregations that are going to cater to you and that's what so many people are looking for. My point is: had Ananias and Sapphira not been dealt with you would not have the verse you have in verse 12 that says all of the people were of one accord in Solomon's portico. The purity results in unity.

Now we go to the third thing, III. The sanctification of the church. Now this is the other side of the coin of unification. They just go together. They like each other a lot, unification and sanctification. All three actually, especially unification and sanctification. They're at least first cousins and they're always together. One is always accompanied by the other.

Notice how it's put in verse 13 of our text, Acts 5:13, "But none of the rest dared to associate with them." That is interesting. What that means is there was a great host of people who were likely attending the small groups and the households, likely attending the worship services. Many of them looked like, "Well, they're on board too. They're coming along too." But when God deal with Ananias and Sapphira and showed that, "No, this place is going to be committed to strive toward purity and holiness," then they decided, "Hey, guess what? I don't think this is the church for us." None of the rest dared to associated with them so all of a sudden in Acts 5, the numbers went down drastically in attendance right when God said, "We're going to have accountability and discipline in this fellowship." Do you know what that's called? That's called sanctification. God is setting the church apart from worldliness and the world which, again, is so kin to purification and so kin to unification.

So people were hesitant. They became cautious about visiting that church. "We don't know about that." How many of you live in a culture where everybody gets divorced and you stay with your spouse, you're the weirdo? Think about it. Now listen to me: if a church is a place where depraved vile sinners come into contact with a Triune holy God, then visiting a church is not the same as going to the lake or to the movie theater. It's different. It's not supposed to be another light, entertaining, uplifting hour. That's not a

church. Go to Six Flags if you want that. It's not church. Now, it can be mightily uplifting and encouraging but in a spiritual way.

There are far too many today who want the church just to be just that. I don't have to think about it. I don't have to pray about it. I don't have to prepare my heart before I go. I don't want to be put on the spot. I don't want to feel uncomfortable. Well, just go to hell. Just push God away. Push his truth away. Just go on to hell like you are. Are you okay? That's old time religion. I don't care if it's old time or new time, it's biblical religion. A lot of old time religion wasn't so good, it was more sentimental and emotional than it was truth sometimes. You know, a true church is something of a paradox. It really is. A true church is the most loving and accepting people in town. It ought to be. And you're that way and I praise God for you. You can't walk in here without feeling people love you and accept you. It's just the way it is. But at the same time, it can be the most intimidating and unsettling environment in town because they're going to preach the Gospel and the Gospel declares men sinners and under the wrath of a holy God. That's unsettling. The Gospel is not, "Your life's not working real well and Jesus is just thrilled if you'd join his team and he'll help you have a better marriage." That's not the Gospel. He might ruin your marriage. Now he saves a lot more than he ruins but there is a possibility that Jesus could cause your spouse to hate you, but you still should commit to Jesus.

Do you want Christianity? Is that what you want? Because that's all I signed up for as your pastor and you knew what you were getting when you called me so don't look at me like this is something new and strange. This is the track we've been on for many many many years. But here's what I'm saying: if someone wants to find God in our community they should know that this church is a place where they can find him. They should think, "That's a place completely devoted to knowing, serving and enjoying God and sharing the truth about God with others." You see, the church is those whom God has set apart for himself. That's sanctification. The local church is a family of called out ones. The word church, ekklesia, called out from the world, sanctified. That's what the word means, set apart. We are not of the world. The world's treasures and pleasures are not our primary pleasures and treasures. And those who are of the world are not comfortable with us and they are not welcome to join us. Did you hear what I said? Now don't you go out here misquoting me out of context. Those who are of the world are not comfortable with us and are not welcome to join us.

"Well, pastor, who can join?" Any of them who'll grow sick of themselves and sick of the world and repent of that sin and put their faith in Jesus Christ, then they are fully welcome to join us. Now you can come and visit and be a part all you want, we'll just love you every way we can, but we don't get the right to add people to this church. God adds them to his church and God shows he's added them by bringing about in their hearts that thing that only the Spirit can do – conviction of sin and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ which brings a corresponding humility and contrite view of ourselves which enables us to have a unification and shows us that we are those who are sanctified, set apart from the way the world views things and the way the world does things. The church is the church. You listen way too slowly.

I know some of you are going to get up and leave early on me if I do this. I'm going to put you on the screen. I've said that for years, one day I'm going to do it. I'm going to do it. You're going to come and say, "What am I doing on the screen?" You left early last week, that's why you're on the screen. Now look, there are folks who have to go to work. This is the one time of year they have some kind of commitment. I understand that. Don't you feel like you can't slip out if you have to do that, but the rest of you stay out of respect for the preaching of the word and the Spirit of God who often does his deepest work at the end of the message.

The admiration for the church, verse 13. This is so interesting. This is part of the cycle that deepens and grows as a true church functions. Verse 13, "But none of the rest dared to associate with them; however, the people held them in high esteem." That's interesting. "We're not real comfortable around that bunch. They're very serious about what's going on. Their God killed some people in the church service a couple of months ago. But do you know what? They believe what they claim they believe. They really try to live what they claim they believe." They admired them and respected them.

My loan was up on my house and I went to get a new loan and I sat down with the lady and she had worked with a number of our staff members and church members and she said, "I want to tell you something. Your people are different. They are kind. They're sweet. They're respectful. They're responsible people." And my heart just soared and I thought, "This lady saw a difference." The admiration of the world. I had a schoolteacher come to me one time. I'm not saying it's always like this but she did come to me and I trust her opinion. She said, "Brother Jeff, Grace Life kids are different." I know. I see it in the schools. I hear the teachers. They're different.

Proverbs 16:7 says, "When a man's ways are pleasing to the LORD, He makes even his enemies to be at peace with him." We had a man who was going through a difficult trial. He is an executive in a large company in a nearby larger city. And in his trial, he began listening to our broadcast out of town and God kept feeding him and blessing him and he got over some bitternesses and some things in his heart and life and began to be repentant and he's back in church now and he's serving the Lord. And he was looking for a person to manage a part of the company and he called one of our staff members and said, in effect, "The ministry there has so impacted my life, you tell me who I need to hire and that's who I'm going to put in my company as a manager. They'll be the right kind of person if you tell me they're the right kind of person." True story. The person is working there right now.

The admiration of the world. "We may not join you but we are growing to respect you." Do you want to be popular or do you want to be respected? Aren't you glad that after 37 years together we're still doing the same old stuff, loving the same Gospel, loving the same Christ, doing the same ministries because they're biblical and we don't have to worry about some new gimmick that comes to town, calls itself a church, and everybody getting all tore up about it? What are you going to do when that blows over? What are you going to do when somebody comes to town with a more interesting game than they're playing? That's not the kind of place you want to raise your children because, look, you

kids will get it. They'll know if you're playing a game and they're going to be turned off and that's why we have young people by the millions abandoning religion, abandoning Christianity and abandoning even a belief in a deity. Atheism is on great rise among millennials. Do you know why? Because so many of them grew up in church and they saw it was a game. They know it wasn't real. They say, "Hey, we love our parents but we're not gonna play the game." And do you know what? They're right. Better be on the outside than on the inside playing the hypocrite.

Admiration of the world. Now listen, if you're a pastor or a faithful member of a true church, you will be rejected by many but you will also be respected by many. Now listen and this has been my experience so often: and in time you will come to be respected by many that initially rejected you. That's what we see here. None of the rest dared associate with them, however, the people held them in high esteem. "We respect those people at that church."

5. And this won't take long: multiplication. Multiplication. We saw purification, unification, sanctification, the admiration of the world and then the church keeps reaching others. So we see that God and Ananias and Sapphira and then down in verse 13, none of the rest dared associate, we see there those who are separating off but God wants you to know that will happen but then I'll start grafting new ones in. Look how he says it there in verse 14 of our text, "And all the more believers in the Lord, multitudes of men and women, were constantly added to their number." You see, the church is a living organism. This is how it breathes. A church will continue to cycle and it will continue to put off the carbon dioxide of unsaved church members and take in the oxygen of new truly converted church members and that's the cycle that keeps going until the day of glorification.

Don't let it freak you out. I'm sure some of these disciples when all the rest dared to associate with them thought, "Well, God has ruined this meeting. God has ruined this church by dealing with Ananias and Sapphira. It was going good until God showed up." You see, you want God to show up and increase your numbers. If God shows up in the average Baptist church, he'll strip it down, brother. People say we need to open the front door and close the back door of the church. No, we need it right the opposite. We need to open the back door and close the front for a while and that's what Grace Life did for a long time until we figured out what a church was, then we started opening the doors back up, metaphorically speaking.

But these breathing out the carbon dioxide of the unsaved and taking in the oxygen of true converts, this is normal, this is regular, but unfortunately most churches are greatly out of balance. They're not functioning in this normal cycle of church life. But verse 14 again. I'm almost done. Stay patient. "And all the more believers in the Lord, multitudes of men and women, were constantly added to their number." Are you listening to your pastor this morning? You don't get verse 14 unless you come through verses 1 through 13. Amen? You don't get to camp on verse 14 until you've got a heart of verses 1 through 13. Can you stomach the dealing with Ananias and Sapphira? Then you may be a church

where God will add true converts and go to true church, but you don't get to 14 if you don't get 1 through 13.

And I can take you to pastor's conference after pastor's conference after pastor's conference, as a matter of fact, I used to go to what's called the Large Church Roundtable, 35 pastors were invited and we were supposed to be the next great pastors of America. Can you believe they asked me to come? I was a square peg in a tiny tiny round hole and we talked about what we're doing and they were all these, incredible stuff they were doing to reach more people to make it go and they'd ask me what we were doing and I'd say this. I'd say this is what we're doing and they'd just get real quiet. Real quiet. Now, we were kind of tongue-in-cheek but God as my witness probably the last time I attended because I just didn't fit and I love those guys and some of them are doing some good stuff but they're on a track we're not on. One of the guys spoke toward the end of the three day meeting and said, "You know, if we're not doing what Noblit is doing, none of the rest of this stuff matters." What they said was it's clear what the Bible says we ought to be. "If we're just glancing by that and doing all this stuff, we're glancing by verses 1 through 13 and we're always camping on verse 14, multitudes are added to the church," he said, "None of this stuff matters." That's exactly what he said. That was a quote.

You don't get verse 14 unless you're participating in the purification, unification, sanctification of verses 1 through 13. Listen, the multiplication of the church, growth in the church, is more the result of being obedient in those first principles than having a good outreach event. Now, we must do good outreach events. Yes, we're going to always do that. It would be sin not to, but we've got to make sure we are working with God. We're on mission to God to build the kind of church that he will draw men and women, boys and girls to who are his. And when you have the church being purified and unified and sanctified and the world respects you more, even though they won't join you, then you have the last thing which is why we're here: the glorification of God. When the church functions his way by his power, he gets the glory and that's what we're about. The other stuff runs out. The other stuff doesn't last but that does.

Now my challenge to you because you've heard these precepts numerous times in various ways, Grace Life Church, will you dedicate yourself afresh with your pastor to what the Scripture says the church ought to be? That will always be imperfect. We will always function with compassion and grace and humility but we must always strive to live these things out for the glory of God. And all of God's people said, Amen.