

Crisis in the Fellowship

By Paris Reidhead*

Will you turn, please, to Acts, Chapter 5. This morning we saw, Fellowship in Crisis, what they did when a problem arose; having all things in common, they shared the crisis, even as they had shared the life of the Lord Jesus in bringing them out of death into life. So in the time of need, they shared this common woe, this common danger and common grief. Now this evening, we are going to see, Crisis in the Fellowship, just the next Chapter, Chapter 5. What happened when a problem arose, not outside of the fellowship, but within, what was God's provision to protect this common life, this sharing, this participation. Now we are building our thinking around a word, and the word is fellowship, or communion, or sharing, or participation; all these English expressions are equated with the one Greek word *koinonia*. It is a wonderful word, one with which we are endeavoring to become acquainted, because we find that we have apportion of what the Lord gave us in Acts 2:42, our key text. We found that we have the Apostles' doctrine. It is before us. It is here; we have the Book. But, it is as "they continued stedfastly in the Apostles' doctrine in fellowship, in *koinonia*." (Acts 2:42)

What did this mean? I think that when we find out what it meant, we have in large measure both the key to the revelation of the glory of Christ, and the nurturing and maturing of believers. I shall read several verses in this 5th chapter. You follow carefully; because the Scripture is in one sense its own best commentary: "But a certain man named Ananias..." Oh, let's go back, shall we, to Barnabas, and see exactly how this developed. "And Joses, who by the apostles was surnamed Barnabas, (which is, being interpreted, The son of consolation,) a Levite, and of the country of Cyprus, Having land, sold it, and brought the money, and laid it at the apostles' feet. Somebody else, another man, by the name of Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a possession, And kept back part of the price, his wife also being privy to it, and brought a certain part, and laid it at the apostles' feet. But Peter said, Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost, and to keep back part of the price of the land? Whiles it remained, was it not thine own? and after it was sold, was it not in thine own power? why hast thou conceived this thing in thine heart? thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God. And Ananias hearing these words fell down, and gave up the ghost: and great fear came on all them that heard these things. And the young men arose, wound him up, and carried him out, and buried him. And it was about the space of three hours after, when his wife; not knowing what was done, came in. And Peter answered unto her, Tell me whether ye sold the land for so much? And she said, Yea, for so much. Then Peter said unto her, How is it that ye have agreed together to tempt the Spirit of the Lord? Behold, the feet of them which have buried thy husband are at the door, and shall carry thee out. Then fell she down straightway at his feet, and yielded up the ghost: and the young men came in, and found her dead, and carrying her forth, buried her by her husband. And great fear came upon all the church, and upon as many as heard these things. And by the hands of the apostles were many signs and wonders wrought among the people; (and they were all with one accord in Solomon's porch. And of the rest durst no man join himself to them: but the people magnified them. And believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women.) Insomuch that they brought forth the sick into the streets, and laid them on beds and couches, that at the least the shadow of Peter passing by might overshadow some of them. There came also a multitude out of the cities round about unto Jerusalem, bringing sick folks, and them which were vexed with unclean spirits: and they were healed every one." (Acts 4:36-5:16)

May God bless to our hearts, this His Word, and cause us to lay hold upon it.

Now in order to understand this, we have to go back to the context. We will resort to summing up to what we said this morning; the people have been drawn one to another by their love for Christ. They have found each other in their mutual need of life, and this life is in the Son, and their fellowship therefore is in the Son. They have gathered unto the Lord Jesus Christ. He it is that has drawn them to Himself, and because He has drawn them to Himself, He has drawn them one to another. When Peter and John were released from the authorities of the Temple, they went to their own company. This group of men and women, of which they were but two, their own company, for they had been made partakers of Christ, and they shared Him with those who also knew Him. They have asked for one thing from the Lord. They didn't ask for protection. They didn't ask to be spared from suffering. They didn't ask to escape persecution. They didn't ask deliverance from death. They weren't

interested in that. Isn't it amazing that the only thing that concerns them was, that they would honor the Lord Jesus Christ, boldly proclaiming His Name, and affirming their faith, showing at no time cowardice or in any wise reflecting upon Him. They cried out to God to exalt the Lord Jesus. They determined that God would so control them, and so fill them, and possess them, that in all boldness they might speak His Word, and that they might declare His Truth. Well God could honor this prayer. He did honor it. And they knew what to expect Him to do. "Stretch forth Thine hand to heal. Let signs and wonders be done by the Name of Thy holy Child Jesus." (Acts 4:30)

There are several things that are patent here. They're very clear. First, we must understand that the message that they *proclaimed was the message that God wanted proclaimed*. The only reason He could confirm it with signs and wonders was because it was the message He wanted to be proclaimed. And this is of tremendous importance. During the past 15, 20 years, there has been a reevaluation on the part of evangelical thinkers in respect to just what is the message that we are to proclaim to our generation. It is not to be critical or negative to say that to a large degree we've lost contact with the unsaved community. They have felt that we evangelicals are a small, decreasing minority of obscurantists that are out of step with our day and generation, that what we hold to and believe is irrelevant, and immaterial, has no significance in this busy 20th century. And to some degree, I suppose we have earned this, because so much of our proclamation has been humanism in another guise.

Humanism is such a subtle thing, because to some degree human interest marks every page of the Bible, everything God says He says for the good of man as well as for His own glory; but there is a philosophical issue here. About 100 years ago, humanism became a dominant philosophy; namely, this that the end of all being in all existence is the happiness of man; man's happiness, man's pleasure became paramount. It was another type of hedonism, if you please. Man exists for pleasure, that God exists for man's pleasure, and that all things are to contribute to man's pleasure. But it was not just in a sensual way. It touched every area and part of life. The liberals, about 1850, said, We don't know about Heaven. We don't know about Hell, but we know you have got to live through 70 years of time; of course it was not 70 then. 50, 60, 70, as the age span has increased. We can't say much about what is going to happen after you die, but we think it is terribly important that you should make a place in the scheme of your life for religion. You come to us on Sunday morning, and let us read some poetry to you, and give you some platitudes, and teach you a few little axioms to live by, if you really wish to; but come anyway, and we will do you good. It will be a little spice and fragrance in your otherwise rather drab life. Come to church, because it will make you happy while you are alive.

Now, essentially this was the message of liberalism. Then it had political overtones and social overtones, pulpit became a means for social reform, doing away with the slums, and getting the milk to the children, all of which was important, but a travesty on the Scripture, because these things were made an end instead of a byproduct, as the Word of God indicates they should be. And there were a group of people that reacted against this. And they were called fundamentalists, because they said, We believe the Bible teaches hell and heaven, it teaches that Jesus Christ is the virgin born Son of God, that He lived a sinless life, and He died a vicarious, atoning death, and He was bodily raised from the dead. We own these things to be self-evident. We hold these to be the basic essentials of Scripture. We hold these to be the fundamentals of our faith, and to them we adhere.

Well, there was a dividing. Denominations divided through the late 1800's. There was the division going on through the Methodist Church, and the Presbyterian, and the Baptist just splitting right down, and of course it came to its fullest in our lifetime, the last 40 years, some of you 50, 60 years, have seen the full extent of this division that has just gone right through and has divided on every side, in every hand.

And so, it was a simple step for the fundamentalists to say, We hold to these things. People that have been born of God, people that have had a real experience with God, have met Him in a transforming relationship, this is wonderful. They had clear frame of reference by which they could unite. We believe these things to be so. It was but just one step to say, You become a Christian if you believe these things to be so. Do you see the difference? The first group, in 1850 shall we say, 1875, had become a Christian on the basis of what had been taught, and what had been preached: Repentance, and faith, and the new birth, and an inward revolution, a transformation effected by the Spirit of God in sovereign grace and power. The next

step was, If you hold these things to be true, you can automatically assume that you have repented, assume you have been born again, and assume that you have the witness of the Spirit. And so the next step from that was, Salvation was reduced down to a plan. And to become a Christian was to assent to a plan. And then the next step was to our generation when for such a long time it has been up until I say it began to be restudied by men some 20 years ago. Well I was instructed, or at least I inferred from my instruction, that all that was needed for anyone to go to Heaven was to say once that Jesus was Lord somehow. And I can remember doing personal work on the bus stops, speaking to a man next to me, a stranger, If you were to miss this bus and be killed, would you go to heaven or hell? Well, I don't know. Would you like to know? Well sure. Everybody would like to know. And then opened my New Testament and flip to a verse and say, See, do you believe that? Well sure. Believe this? Yes. Believe this? All right, now if you are willing to really accept it and say you believe it, put your hand in mine; and then when he would extend his hand, I'd say, Now Brother, I'll meet you in Heaven. God bless you. You have been saved. And swing off on the bus, he to go his way, and I mine. But I had been taught that this could substitute for meeting God, this was the kind of personal work in which I was instructed, and when on Sunday morning in Mission's Chapel, or report hour, I would tell how I had done this on the bus stop. There would be Amen's Brother from among the other enthusiastic students that had probably done similarly, if not that week in other weeks. And it was reduced down to this, and the consequence was that the church of the Lord Jesus was invaded by people that had head knowledge or some concept of a plan, however nebulous and incomplete it might be, that had been baptized, that had said they had accepted Jesus; but then we had statements coming out such as the one R. G. Lee made that I have repeated to you, who said that in his estimation, based on 40 years' observation, probably no more than 1 out of 10 of the people of his denomination, the Southern Baptist, gave Bible evidence of ever having been born of God. Well think of that, one out of ten. And there are 8 million. That means 8 hundred thousand. And then he said, If I have made an error, because the preachers gasped, then I have put it to high. It is probably far less.

And others. Andrew Blackwood in his chapter in the volume, Contemporary Evangelical Thought, edited by Carl F.H. Henry and Contemporary Evangelism cites two authorities to which I have referred, stating that there were - one, I think 17, (it has been some time since I read it) and the other 22 per cent of the members of evangelical churches, not avowed liberals but churches such as our, that gave Bible evidence of having been born of God. Well, I do not wish to argue the point. The point is that men have been concerned. They've been burdened, because it has been possible for people to substitute a plan for a Person, and a plan doesn't save, and a scheme of doctrine doesn't save, and a Scripture verse doesn't save, and a decision doesn't save. No one is saved apart from these things. But salvation is not to be equated with a Scripture verse, nor a plan, nor a system of doctrine. Salvation is a Person. It is a Person. Salvation is not something a Person died to send. It is something that He died to bring, to bring when He comes. And if that Person is not there, salvation isn't there, because He cannot send it apart from Himself. It is Christ who is our life. "And He who hath the Son hath life," not He who hath the verse that says He that hath the Son. (I John 5:12) Because life isn't in the verse; life is in the Son. And the verse tells you about the Son, tells you what the Son did, tells you what you've done, but it doesn't substitute for Him. Now the characteristic fact of this church is that everyone in it had Him. He had come. He had come in forgiveness. He had come in pardon. He had come in justification, regeneration. But we must understand something else. Everyone in this church also knew the fullness of the Holy Spirit, because at this time in the early church there wasn't any separation. There was a separation in terms of time and sequence, but it was very small. It's the separation that means, It has to happen in succession.

Yesterday we had a marriage ceremony. I said, Do you say, I do. And there was proper response. And I could say, I now pronounce you man and wife. Now there was a separation between the I wills and the pronouncing of the man and wife, but it was a separation that was just in sequence of utterance. And so it is that there is a separation here. Peter said, "Repent and be baptized every one of you, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. For the promise is to you, to your children, and them that are afar off, even to as many as the Lord our God shall call." (Acts 2:38,39) And we find in the Philadelphia Confession of Faith, which was the Baptist confession of 1689 and in 1743 Benjamin Franklin printed it. So you know relatively the time. I love that. I wish I could sometime run across an original copy of that. I am sure that it doesn't exist except in libraries. I'd love to have a copy of that original, one that he printed, of the Philadelphia Confession of Faith, as distinct from the New Hampshire Confession which came some years later.

But in it, in article 31, there is the laying on of hands. This is a very interesting chapter. And it was by Baptists now. It wasn't by the Alliance. We didn't even exist for 150 years after that. This was by the Baptists in Philadelphia who met together and said, This is what we believe. And they said they went ahead to say that after one has been regenerated, they should be taught that not only did Christ die for them, but they died with Him, and that when they went into the water of baptism, it was not simply to repeat what Christ did, but it was a testimony of their union with Christ in His death, their union with Him in His burial, and their union with Him in resurrection, that they were reckoning themselves to be crucified and buried, quickened, and raised.

Then following baptism, and before they partook of the Lord's Supper, the elders would gather about these that had just been baptized in water, and would lay their hands on them, and they cited Ananias coming to Paul, and Peter and John going down to Samaria, and Paul at Ephesus, and the elders would gather and lay their hands on these that had just been baptized, for a further impartation of the Holy Spirit, not for the extraordinary gifts of the Spirit, they specified, but for an impartation of His fullness and life in order that they might be prepared to serve in the church, and to witness in the community, saying this is the apostolic pattern, and we are Bible believers.

Well, it is very interesting to me that it should have been spelled out so explicitly in the Philadelphia Confession of Faith. And this was actually an inserted chapter over the London Confession of Faith. But they had gone back to the Word, to say, What does the Scripture teach, what is the pattern. And they said, saw three things. First, *they saw there was to be this matter of identification with Christ* as hinged closely to forgiveness, and taught by water baptism. And I believe they are absolutely right. I believe that water baptism is far more than just acting out in obedience to what Christ did. It is an identification with Him, and it ought to be a visualization of our death, burial, and resurrection with Him. *And then secondly, they said, Being filled with the Spirit of God and the Word of God was something more than an individual's own concern. It is the concern of the church.* For if people come into the life of the church that have not known this further impartation for life and for service, they are going to have to act in such energy as they possess; though forgiven, it will still be natural. And everything in the church that is to be done must be done on that supernatural energy and life. And so they said the church must enter in. This is a matter of the church's responsibility. And I believe they were absolutely right. Certainly Peter and John came down to Samaria, these who were apostles, and entered into the ministry of Philip who was a deacon, and prayed and instructed these people in order that they might be prepared for church life, and there was no *koinonia*, no fellowship of any sort that we could see, other than great rejoicing over a mutual experience. But there was no corporate life until Peter and John came down, because He who is the corporate life is the Spirit of God who is to fill the believers. It is as though we had behind here on the wall a billboard similar to that which you see out on Times Square, only conveying the Gospel. Maybe there are 50, 100, a 1,000 they say I have read in the newspaper that if you stand in the center of Times Square and make a complete circle you can see over one million lights. You would like to know how many a million is? Just make that circle and see the lights, you have seen a million, they are there.

Well, suppose we had behind me a board filled with lights, bulbs all of them properly connected, and all of them properly put into the sockets, but for one thing. Some of them, some of them have not been tightened down sufficiently to establish contact. And suppose these lights convey a message, and suppose that just half the lights are on, and someone is in the dark reading the message and he cannot see what the lights spell without it, just only as it illuminated, and half of them go on. Is there a message conveyed? The board has been prepared, the lights have been procured, the current flows, but half of the bulbs are not tightened into the socket, and there is no flow. And so the message is distorted, it isn't clear; it's not legible, because the bulbs have not been put in such relationship where they can sustain the flow of energy. And this I suppose is what some who are observers of the church in our day would say is the case. Not questioning, questioning of course whether many people actually in membership in churches have been born again, but in addition to that number that are born again, what percentage have experienced, according to their own testimony the fullness of the Spirit of God. So we have got to see. These in the New Testament truly repented. There is cost, great price, in identifying with the Lord Jesus Christ. Secondly, *they had understood identification*. They had been baptized. And thirdly, the church had entered into them with this which was prime necessity, a basic condition for participation in church life; *they had been brought into an experience of the fullness of the Spirit*.

All of this apparently was prerequisite for understanding of the Biblical term *koinonia*, or sharing, or fellowship. Now how far have you come. Let's establish the first question. Have you truly repented? Is it your purpose to please God? Have you at some point in your pilgrimage come to the place where the intent of your heart is to please Him? Have you been forgiven of past sins? Do you know that you are pardoned? Do you have the witness of the Spirit that you have passed from death to life, and that that great sword aimed at your heart was sheathed in His, and you have been thus pardoned of your past sins, because Christ died for you? Have you come that far with me?

Have you come to the meaning of baptism? Death with Christ? Crucifixion with Him? Burial with Him? And resurrection with Him? Well, these are essentials for Biblical *koinonia*. But what about the other? And perhaps it is the fault of the eldership. Perhaps it is the fault — I know in my own case when I saw, and it was not easy. You see some people are born free, and some purchase their freedom with great price, great price. But my heart became so desperately hungry. When I saw in the Word of God that there is a relationship to Him which is based upon regeneration, which is prerequisite to regeneration. But there is an experience of death to self, and the fullness of the Spirit of God. And I went here and there and asked one and the other, and was brushed off one way, and brushed off another. It is a lonely, lonely thing, you know. I was in one ditch of dispensational deadness to which I had been drawn early in my Christian life. My Bible was about the size of a Sunday School quarterly. Matthew was for the Jews, and oh, dear, dear, dear. I went to Africa with a Bible just about as big as a short quarter in the Sunday School literature. That is all. Ephesians, Philippians, and Colossians, and juicy portions in Ephesians that you had to consign to the original ones to whom it was written. I used to wonder. It seemed such a terrible thing that God had cut down on what He was giving to such a point as He had. But nevertheless I began to see that I was in one ditch, and others with me, and some had far more life than I did. And I suppose that everyone — you meet someone. It certainly was true.

I had gone right from Bible School where I had been so wrapped up in dispensationalism to Taylor University, and just about that time dear John C. Wengatz, my I wish he could come to New York. John Wengatz, who was instrumental in great revivals in the Methodist Church, in Angola in Africa and in Liberia. And he would come to Taylor Chapel, a graduate of Taylor, and honored alumnus, and he would start to tell us about God. And I was sitting then, a senior student, right in front. I'd look up at him, listen to him talk, and the glory of God was on him, and the wonder of the Lord was upon him, and I'd just — tears just unbidden would run down my cheeks. This man had what I had to have or die. And I'd go over and talk with him in his apartment in the dormitory, for he was staying there, and then he would start to explain it to me, and I could prove to him that he didn't know what he was talking about. I was sufficiently egotistical, or something, I was certainly carnal to do it. Then I would go back the next day, or the next time he spoke and cry again. Finally I went over to him and said, "Mr. Wengatz, will you do me a favor? Don't try to explain this, just pray that God will do for me what He has done for you. And then probably when He has done it I'll understand, I don't want my mental difficulties to stand in the way, because I have sensed the glory of God is on you, in a way that I must know Him or I'll die. Just die. I cannot go on living, knowing that God has something that is manifest in your life." Well, it is people that you meet that have met God, who change your life. It is an encounter with someone that has been somewhere.

The people in Samaria never got over the fact that Philip came. The people in Ephesus never got over the fact that Paul came. And you have touched someone along the way, someone whom we have met, and we knew them, and God was there. You sensed that He was there.

Well this is what characterized that early church. There were people that had met God. Now the crisis in the fellowship is this. And I am not trying to establish someone if you come to me afterwards and say, Where did Ananias and Sapphira go? I am going to have to say, Yes, I'd like to know. Let's wait till we get to Heaven, and we'll go together up to the throne and say, Lord, where did they go. And if they are there we'll meet them, and if they aren't we'll have Him explain why. But as far as I am concerned, this is a problem that is silent, and I am not going to speculate on it. The only thing I am going to say is, They didn't stay in church very long, when duplicity entered into their heart. Now I am confident that if God had done to everybody what He did to Ananias and Sapphira, the pew where you are sitting would probably be empty, and the pulpit behind which I am standing at this hour would be empty of me at least. For there have been times in all of our pilgrimage when we have made vows, and have lied to the Holy Ghost. Not that we have done it with purpose, but God was here giving to us a principle, a principle that was enabling us to see something of His nature and His character. And we therefore must recognize that it is

God's answer to the question, How important is the fellowship to God? and to the church? How important is it? What does it mean?

Now everyone that picked up sticks was not stoned, and undoubtedly everyone who has taken some Babylonish garment in pledge of gold was not piled under a heap of stones. God gave evidence of His attitude all down the way. They will all be dealt with, and no one will escape. But I am certain in my own heart that this we have read of Ananias and Sapphira was God's object lesson to me and to you, to enable us to see how serious is the sin of lying to the Holy Ghost first, and how vital it is to keep the fellowship clear of sin. How important it is that there should be transparent honesty, and how absolutely important it is that one should have no ulterior motive in His service.

Now we can say that the sin of Ananias and Sapphira is extended whenever anyone performs any service with the thought of keeping back part of the price, that is something for himself, glory for himself, or honor for himself, or a name, or whatever it might be. They wanted something from this, they wanted to serve God truly, but they wanted something for themselves. So we would not just allow it to be money that is returned from selling property, but any service that has a byproduct for self in it. When an eye is not single to His glory.

But the thing that you must see, if you are to understand is that a crisis is now occurring in the fellowship. The enemy is seeking to invade and thus destroy the unity of the Spirit, and thus destroy, remove the blessing of God, and make it impossible for God to continue to pour out of His Spirit upon them. God thereby gives an illustration of how important it is that the fellowship should be kept blessable. But I think if you have thought with me up to this point, you are asking one question. How did Peter know the amount of money involved, and Ananias sinned? How did Peter know? Because it obvious that Peter did not have to send out an investigating committee to find out. Ananias brings the money and says, Here Peter, I sold my house for so much, and here is the money. Instead of taking the money, Peter says, No, Ananias, you didn't sell your house for so much. Why do you lie to the Holy Ghost? You sold your house for so much. And you have kept the rest. Now the question is, How come Peter didn't deal with this the way we would have had to have dealt with it normally. Said, Oh, Ananias, Thank you so much. We deeply appreciate that. Now Barnabas is not the only son of consolation. We have Ananias who is another. This is the way if might have been had it been on the level of the day. But you see, there was another factor here, another factor, and that is that in addition to the impartation of the Holy Spirit for fruit, and for life, and for the witness, and for service, there were the extraordinary gifts of the Spirit, and a gift of the Spirit is in operation here. It is the gift of the Word of Knowledge. Now I personally believe that the gifts of the Spirit, all 9 of them, have been in the church, they have never been out of the church, as Dr. Tozer¹ said one day, some two or three conferences ago when he was here, "If the gifts of the Spirit had not been in the church, the church could never have survived as well as it has to the present."

But this is a gift of the Spirit. It is the gift of the Word of Knowledge, if I understand the Scripture correctly. The Spirit of God is God, not less than God. He is God. And Peter is filled with the Holy Ghost, and Peter's spirit is clothed upon with the Holy Spirit. And when Peter's spirit is covered and clothed with the Holy Spirit, it is a very simple matter for the Holy Spirit to communicate to Peter something that Peter had not learned by the usual process of either seeing, or hearing, or feeling, or experiencing. Something is known by Peter that could not have been known by any natural function. No one has told Peter. No one has related to Peter. Peter instantly knows, immediately knows, the price and the factors concerning it, and the attitude of Ananias, and what to say about it. Peter wasn't going to have to — Someone said, Look what Peter did to Ananias. Peter did not do anything to Ananias. Peter simply anticipated what God was going to do, and related to Ananias in advance of its happening what God was going to do, and what God did.

But you see, this is a gift of the Spirit. And I believe that the extraordinary gifts of the Spirit, the nine gifts, of which we have spoken in the past. There are three power gifts, and three utterance gifts, and three knowledge gifts in the nine that you read of in I Corinthians 12. But these are the knowledge gifts, whereby they could know something they would not otherwise know, that it was God's intent and purpose that these be in operation.

¹ Aiden Wilson Tozer (1897-1963) Pastor and Author. Christian and Missionary Alliance

Now you do not find anything being said about it. You would only know it if you knew from the Old Testament for instance, the experience of Elijah, and others of the prophets, how they knew, how they knew what to do. You remember the time when the axe was dropped into the river. (II Kin. 6:5) How did the prophet know what to do to recover the axe? There certainly wasn't any book on it, and it is completely contrary to nature to cast in a tree and the iron would swim, and break the law, that gravitational pull that would draw the iron to the bottom. (II Kin. 6:6) How did he know? Well, he knew something he could not know except God had told him. And you remember when Gehazi followed Naaman, and went to him and said, O master, you know my lord has changed his mind, and he would like to have those garments. He was a little hasty in sending you away. He took another look at his wardrobe. And some of his suits are getting frayed around the cuff, and he figured that he was just a little hasty. Now, if you will give it to me I'll be glad to take it to him. Naaman said, Oh, certainly, here you are. I feel very relieved it you will take it back and tell him I am so glad he changed his mind. And Gehazi hid it, and he came in, served the prophet, and he said to Gehazi: You went down the road after Naaman, you stopped him at such and such a corner, and you said this to him, and you said this to him, and you took these garments, so many, and the gold so much, and you put it there. And Gehazi's eyes begin to bulge, you know, and sort of, you could have brushed him off with a stick. How is this? How did this happen? And then the prophet said, Do you not think and know that my Spirit went with thee? (II Kin. 5:21-26) Now what Spirit does he speak about? His own? No. He speaks of the Holy Spirit.

You see, God is present. "In Him, we live, and we move, and we have our being." (Acts 17:28) And since God was where Gehazi was, and God was in the prophet, it was a very simple matter for God there to tell the prophet here was happening there so that he would know.

You understand of course that most of us — did you read this last week's editorial in the Witness about the absentee God, the God who is confined way off up there in Heaven? And we have to innovate and invent, and develop? You had better read it. Tremendous. Do you worship "a God in whom you live, and move, and have your being?" And do you understand that the normal relationship for a Christian is to be filled with the fullness of God, and your spirit covered with the Holy Spirit. This is why the house shook in the previous chapter, because here were a people, broken before the Lord, broken before each other, utterly sharing the risen Christ, and He was in them, and they were in Him, and He was so delighted to have a people that loved Him with their whole hearts that He just trembled with joy and when they did the whole house shook. That is all it was. It was not hard. The difficulty was that He just restrained Himself, for if He hadn't,...

I remember years ago being in a prayer meeting with some very zealous young men, and one of them raising his voice to a high pitch cried, O God, reveal Thyself in the fullness of Thy glory, as Thou dost reveal Thyself in Heaven, reveal Thyself here. And for a minute I thought that perhaps the Lord would, and I began to tremble, a little, and I said under my breath, Lord, he is sincere and earnest, but don't take him at his word, because if the Lord revealed Himself in any measure here as He did there we would all be evaporated. Because no man can see Him in His essence and live. God is light. We have such a low tolerance for light in these mortal bodies of ours. But you understand that the part of us that is changed now in regeneration is our spirits, and the part of us that He fills is the human spirit, and the part of us that knows God is the human spirit. And the part that — where we worship — they that worship God worship Him in their spirit. God is Spirit, and in your spirit you worship God. And these bodies of ours are — well they are just convenient tenements. Just sort of an address where the Lord can meet with us. But He is not restricted to them. And when a company of people such as there were here, however many there were, were all in love with the Lord, and all meeting Him, no wonder the place shook. And so no wonder Peter knew what Ananias paid, because you see God was there. He was there. He was there when Ananias made the deal. It was such a simple matter for God who was there at the time to tell Peter in whom He was exactly what happened. Peter saw it just the way it happened.

Our Lord had such a ministry as this, seeing. You remember He went to make that hospital call down there at the pool where all the sick were waiting for the angel to trouble the water, and as He came in, He didn't speak to this one. He maybe smiled, looked at them in pity and love. But you see, our Lord said "He could do nothing of Himself." (John 5:19) If they had asked Him to heal them, He would have, because the Father said He could heal any that asked Him. But they didn't know who He was, and they didn't ask Him. But finally "He went around, and He saw one man lying there, and He asked the man, Wilt thou be made whole? And the man said, No man did move me. He said, Stand up. Took him by the hand, and the man stood up, and he instantly was made whole." (John 5:5-9) And asked about it later, our Lord said this, I can only do what I see the Father do.

Now I do not know how, it doesn't say, but either at the time or previously in prayer, God had given Him a vision of something that was going to happen, a situation; when He came to that, situation, there was the person, He had seen what had happened previously, "Wilt thou be made whole, the Father has shown me that you are the man that He will make whole." He knew something that he couldn't have known if it had not been communicated by the Father. You see, He was God. Yes. But remember this, for the purpose of His ministry, He relinquished the right to act in His essential Deity as Son, and He accepted the limitations of His humanity so that He could be like you, that in all things He could be like His brethren. And so He said, "I do nothing of myself. I only do what I see the Father do. I do not speak of myself. I only speak as I receive commandment of My Father."

And so I am saying three things. First, *that this fellowship was based upon a relationship with God* that we call here normal Christianity. Secondly, *that the integrity of the fellowship was of tremendous importance to God*, so much more so than any individual. Ananias and Sapphira, as important as they were, were nevertheless expendable when it came to the matter of protecting the integrity of the church, and they were incapable of repentance. Of this I am confident. If they had been capable of repentance and change, I am convinced in my own heart, the Lord would have given them opportunity, but He knew their hearts, and so this was His way of illustrating His value on the church, and its spiritual integrity.

But the third thing that we learn from this is that among the – *in the church, in the body was to be the presence of the Holy Spirit Himself, through the members of the body, affording eyes that the work might be there.*

Oh to recognize eyes. Dr. Tozer² wrote in our book, oh an article in the Witness, maybe 10, 8 years ago, They Hanged their Prophet; it was an article extolling Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Have you read his book, The Cost of Discipleship? Well I hope that there are about a hundred of you that order it tomorrow by telephone and that Miss Woolford is just busy taking names and addresses, because that one chapter the costly grace is worth 10 times the price of the book. And it's done more to cause American pastors and people to think through some of the issues confronting us than probably any other. But, they did not recognize that God had put a voice into Germany, the Nazi Germany. They didn't know it. And we must recognize that the Spirit of God does not give all the gifts to any one person, but they are there in the body for the sake of the body. But, of course, this apart from a proper relationship on the part of the people, this — you cannot take one thing. This is why I feel so deeply that we are in error when we talk about the key. Well there may be many keys, many parts, and many things that need to go wrong.

Recently a vehicle I was driving stopped, and I had to have the car fixed. Well we thought it was the points. Put in new points; didn't start. Thought it was the coil; put in new coil; didn't start. Thought it was the coil... Finally had to put in a fuel pump and we got to the part that was wrong. Now what is the key? The car can stop. It is the part that isn't working. And what is the key to *koinonia*? Where does the crisis in the assembly arise? It arises at the point where we have omitted some principle, and failed in some truth, and are ignorant of something God wants done. It behooves us therefore to come back and realize that this is not an impossible thing, any more than an automobile is impossible, or a television set is impossible. There are repairmen that can fix these things. Now I am a perfect novice. I feel like the Mohammedans If a car stops, kick the tire, or shove the fender, or slam the hood. If it doesn't start, I don't know what to do after that. You see, that is the extent of my mechanical knowledge. I just haven't gone any further than that. Out in Africa, they kill a chicken, sprinkle the blood on the radiator, and then if it doesn't start they don't know what to do. So, this is about the extent of mine. But there are people that know what to do, and know how to fix it.

And brethren, I do believe with all my heart that the crisis in the church or in the fellowship now, is that we have failed to understand the foundation of fellowship as we can and should, and it is clear. The integrity that God places upon it, the importance that He puts upon spiritual integrity in the fellowship, and the gifts of the Spirit that were given by Him for the protection of the fellowship. But it is personal. Let's come back to you, and close with this.

² Aiden Wilson Tozer (1897-1963) Pastor and Author. Christian and Missionary Alliance

How far have you come? What contribution do you make? I remember seeing it in an office recently — Are you part of the solution, or are you part of the problem? And I have to keep asking my own heart this, again and again. Are we part of the solution, or are we part of the problem? How far have you come in your relationship to the Lord? Is your repentance complete? Conscience void of offence toward God? Have you understood something of your union with Christ in death? Have you come into the experience of the fullness of the Holy Spirit? Have you understood something of God's purpose in the body, in fellowship with others? You are somewhere along the line. So am I. But I believe your presence here on a Sunday night, certainly with nothing to pander to the flesh, just to come and consider the Word, is proof and token that you want something better than you now have, and you want God to get something better out of your life than He is now getting, and you want Him to get something out of the church more than He presently has. Am I correct? Oh, wouldn't you love to see it again, where great fear, that's awe, not just being afraid, but great awe came upon all the church and upon as many as heard these things, "and no man durst join themselves to them, and the people magnified them." Oh, to let the Lord Jesus get the glory, and hear principles, and principles that apply to your life, and somewhere you find yourself. Let us take a moment of prayer. Let's just do it this way tonight. Let's think back to try and visualize the scene of which we have been speaking, try and look at it from the eyes of history and see this people, small in number, hated and despised, and yet loved of God, greatly loved of God. Let's take a moment of meditation. How do you fit in: Do you believe the Lord Jesus has less power than He had then? Do you believe He has less love than He had then? Do you believe that He has less grace than He had then? It is not just enough to say, We are the problem. The question is, You do not want to be a problem, nor do I. Where are we problems? And where do our lives create roadblocks? And how can our lives be adjusted so as to allow Him to get from us the witness and testimony that He wants?

Our Father, we are tonight a thoughtful people. The world stands in awe of our atom bombs, and our nuclear weapons, frightened of the fact that there are 30 thousand megatons of nuclear explosives available; and, our God, they have got to see that Jesus Christ is alive from the dead, not just in individual instances of healing and miracle. This we thank Thee for. But, Father, our hearts yearn tonight as we have read the Word to be part of a people that love the Lord Jesus with all that is in them, just ordinary people like these of whom we have read, that are so related to Thee and adjusted to Thy will and way, that Thou canst trust Thy glory with them in some measure beyond what we have seen. And Father, we don't know very much about this. Some things we see, but we need to be taught. We see some more principles. We have added to those we considered in the morning, and we understand a little how important it is that there should be integrity in the body. Perhaps while we are waiting in closing, Father, there is someone to whom Thou wilt speak that has had a name to live but has not really had the witness of the Holy Ghost that they have been born again and have not life. What a mercy, and how gracious it would be of Thee, Father, if they would frankly and openly admit this and seek Thee until Thou hast met them. Then, Father, there are possibly some that have heard about the crucified life, and identification, but they have never entered into it experientially, and appropriated this truth. Perhaps there are others, Lord, of us that do not know the fullness of thy Spirit in quickening and in power, and in the resurrection life of Christ released in us, We are here, Lord, we must wait on Thee. Preaching is not enough. Teaching is not enough. Outlines that are mimeographed, good as they may be, are not enough. Somehow we have got to have a visitation from Thee, that just lays hold of our hearts, till all the other interests seem to lose their hold and grip upon our imaginations and the fact that the risen Christ is looking for a people to whom He can reveal Himself, and through whom He can show how glorious He is, that awe may come upon those outside, that they may know that truly God is in the midst of His own, and that Thou canst add to the church daily such as should be being saved. Lord, give to us tonight a passionate longing to be part of something that is of Heaven, that didn't spring up from earth, didn't begin in program, it came down from Heaven. Give it to us, Lord, tonight a desire to be part with Thee in something that is wholly from Thyself. And so teach us, lead us, take us by the hand. We are children, Lord; we have not been this way before. But we want our lives to count for eternity. Father, in one blow we could be liquidated, just vaporized here as we live in this city; target one, for any enemy action. We don't want, Lord, to have just survived, and have robbed the Lord Jesus of an opportunity to show how wonderful He is. This is what we long for, and so lead us out of ourselves and our previous attitudes, and into a release in Thy will and purpose, until, Lord, students meeting in their rooms, friends meeting in their homes, young people meeting in their residences, wherever they are, there is just a going in after Thee, and a meeting Thee, spontaneous, fitting our local

needs, but an opportunity for us to share together the risen life of Christ. We ask this, believing, Father, that if there are those here that have been spoken to by Thy Spirit they will count it wisdom to make known their need and deal with it tonight.

And before we close with the Benediction, if you have spiritual need, do not leave until you've dealt with it. I wonder if there are those tonight that would say by upraised hand, Yes I do have need, must be dealt with before I can have part in what God is doing. If you would care to raise your hand, we would be so happy to remember you in prayer. Then let us stand, (you stay and make known your need if you will) Let us stand for the Benediction.

“Now unto Him who is able to do exceeding abundantly above all we can ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, unto Him be glory in the Church by Christ Jesus, throughout all ages world without end. Amen.” (Eph. 3:20,21)

* Reference such as: Delivered at The Gospel Tabernacle Church, New York City on Sunday Evening, October 28, 1962 by Paris W. Reidhead, Pastor.

©PRBTMI 1962