

\* **Considering and Provoking One Another**  
Hebrews 10:24

\* **Our Ever-Living Intercessor**  
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\* **Why Go to Church?**  
Hebrews 10:25

\* **The Pouring Out of the Holy Spirit**  
Acts 2:1-4

\* **The Necessity of Church Membership**  
Hebrews 10:25

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themselves do not save. That is the second thing we must look for.

The third thing we must look for in a church has to do with the structure of the church along the lines of what we have already talked about in this message. Does the church have a leadership of elders who administer Christian discipline and guide and care for the church in a spiritual manner? The church, even though it is an earthly institution, is a heavenly organization. Its focus must be on spiritual things. Today many people look for churches based on external things: how large is the church, how friendly is it, how many ministries does it have, and so on. But the standards of the Scripture are spiritual—you should look for Christ and His presence in the preaching of the gospel, in the

administration of the sacraments, and in the leadership of the elders.

Until Jesus comes again and gathers the church as one in its final glory, He calls us to gather with other believers to be a part of His church here on the earth.

Let us pray.

Father, we give thanks for the church of Jesus Christ. We pray that she may be found faithful here in the earth even in evil days. We ask that there may remain on earth a committed core of Christians who will give themselves and their resources to the church so that the church may continue in her calling to proclaim the gospel to all nations until the day that our Lord returns. We pray this for Jesus' sake, Amen.

### THE REFORMED WITNESS HOUR

May 3, 2015  
No. 3774

*Considering and Provoking One Another*  
*Rev. Rodney Kley*

Dear Radio Friends,

If you have your Bibles, I ask you to open with me to Hebrews chapter 10, where we will be considering verse 24. "And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works." This is the third exhortation in this brief section in Hebrews 10:19-25, which we have given the title "A New Testament Call to Worship."

After setting before New Testament Christians a unique privilege of constant access to God, the writer calls us, first, to draw near to God; second, to hold fast to our profession; and now, third, to consider one another and to provoke unto love and good works. Really, this exhortation continues in the next verse in the words "not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching."

In these two verses, we have really come to the main point of the writer, the thing that he really wants to get at. He is addressing two dangers in the New Testament church that are still very common today. The first is a spirit of individualism

among Christians, which says, "I am saved, I have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, and that is all that matters. I don't need the church." That is addressed in verse 25 when he says that as Christians we must not forsake the gathering of ourselves together as the manner of some is. This danger we will address when we get to verse 25 in the next two messages on this section.

Today, we want to focus on verse 24, which addresses another danger in the church also very common today. It is this: that every Christian wants his own personal ministry and place of prominence and recognition in the church. This was a danger in the early church, too. For example, you have the story of Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5. They sold a piece of land and, because they wanted recognition, lied about the amount they had received as payment for the land. Or you read I Corinthians and it is about different members in the church coveting positions and gifts of other, more prominent members. And this is a great danger in the church today, too. The modern church, in many

ways, is overwhelmed by this problem. In many circles the church has lost its focus altogether. Instead of preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ as it is called to do, the church has become a place where people find fulfillment in all kinds of ministries. And the text that we look at today addresses this by laying before us the ministry and the calling that every believer has. This is not a ministry just for a few people, for the pastor, or for the more out-going members of the church, but, if you are a Christian, no matter who you are, this is your ministry and this is your calling. That is why the verse begins with the plural: "Let us," that is, all of us, as Christians together, do this.

What is this ministry and calling to which we are all called? It comes in two parts in the text. First, we are to consider one another and, second, we are to provoke one another to love and good works.

The English words, "one another" are very important in the New Testament. This is the Bible's answer to the spirit of individualism that says, "I don't need other Christians, and I'm not going to contribute anything to the lives of my fellow believers." In the Greek, this is one word, and it is used more than a hundred times in the New Testament. As Christians, we

are to love one another, pray for one another, bear one another's burdens, forgive one another, be at peace with one another, not speak evil of another, and so on.

You see, our sinful nature is selfish. In our natural pride, we think of ourselves more highly than others and we put our own needs and happiness first. We ask the question: "What's in it for me?" But in true Christianity there is no room for this because we follow a Savior who humbled Himself. In Philippians 2, He became a servant to His people. And He calls us to do the same: to look not on our own things but the things of others and to esteem others better than ourselves.

And here, in Hebrews 10:24, it is put this way, "Let us consider one another." Or we would say, be considerate of one another. When you consider something, you focus on it, you observe, you investigate it, you give it a thoughtful and thorough and close examination so that you can have a clear understanding of it and draw an accurate conclusion about it. This is a word that Jesus uses in Luke 11 when He says, "Consider the lilies," and "Consider the ravens." He means, stop and think about them, meditate on them. And this is the idea here. We are to consider one another, that is, we are to give intentional, on-going thought

distance ourselves from the church, we take ourselves away from the proper and ordinary means of grace. And this becomes spiritually detrimental to a Christian.

So these are the six reasons that every Christian should be a member of the local church. Let me recap all six of them. One, because Jesus Christ loves local churches. Two, because the church is a spiritual family. Three, because in the New Testament believers were added to local churches and exhorted to live in the context of the local church. Four, because elders can do their work in the church only when there are committed members. Five, because Christian discipline is impossible without church membership. And, six, because the church is the main instrument by which God administers His grace to believers.

Now, there remains one question: How do you know which church to join? Will just any church that goes by the name of Christian do? Here we need to be discerning as Christians. There are at least three things that we should look for in a local church.

The first is this: Whether

the gospel is faithfully and purely preached from Scripture. That is, the content of the preaching is God's Word, not human ideas. God Himself is extolled in all His attributes as the righteous and just and holy God who, in sovereign love and mercy, has saved His people. The preaching declares that Jesus Christ died on the cross in the place of sinners in order to satisfy the justice of God. And the preaching calls sinners to repent and believe on Jesus Christ.

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In short, the question is this: Is God's Word faithfully proclaimed in all its aspects? That is the first thing to look for in a church.

The second thing we should look for in a church is this: Whether the sacraments are administered in a biblical way? Some teach that the sacraments are a magical way of being saved. Others say that anyone who pleases can receive the sacraments. But with discernment, we have to ask this question: Does the church administer the sacraments in a way that agrees with biblical teaching, so that the sacraments are administered to believers to confirm their faith? And sacraments are to be viewed as a secondary means to the preaching of the gospel. The sacraments

number four. Christ has given to the church the right to excommunicate from its fellowship those who walk in sin without repentance. In Matthew 18 the steps of what we call church discipline are laid out by Jesus Christ. First, if your brother sins against you, you go to him privately and talk to him. This puts an obligation on every member of the church with regard to the other members. Second, if your brother will not repent of his sin, then you take a witness and you talk to your brother. So first, you deal with it privately, and then you have another person in the church who is aware of the situation help you to deal with him. And then Jesus says, if your sinning brother still will not hear you, you are to tell it to the church. And He does not mean by that that you stand up and tell everyone in the church about the sin that someone has committed. But you bring the situation to the attention of the leaders in the church, the elders. And they become involved in admonishing the sinning brother. And then, if he will not hear them, Jesus says, he must be put out of the fellowship of the church—excommunicated.

Let me ask a simple question here. If a person is not a member

of a church, how is it even possible for the elders to put that person out of the church? The church needs members so that the elders can do their work of oversight; so that there can be proper accountability between believers in the church; and so that there can be a purging out of the leaven of sin and false teaching through discipline and excommunication. Church discipline is impossible without church membership. That is the fifth reason.

And then there is one more reason: reason number six. The local church is the main instrument through which Christ administers His grace to believers. The church is not here only to reach the unconverted by the preaching of the gospel, but the church is here in this world with the calling to teach and preach God's Word to those who are already Christians. So that believers, as they hear that

Word of God, may continue to grow in faith and maturity as Christians. Believers need the church. The church is the proper

place for this spiritual growth because Christ has given the church the right to proclaim the gospel and to administer the sacraments and to exercise Christian discipline. When we

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to others, to be sensitive and sympathetic.

From a practical point of view, how does that look? It means that, as a Christian, I think of others whom God has placed in my life. Perhaps I make a mental list of them all. And then I take one of them and I set aside time to think about that individual, to put myself in his or her shoes, to try to understand him or her. And that, of course, means that I have to know others. I have to interact with these other Christians. I have to fellowship with them in order to get to know them. You see, that is an important part, an aspect of being in a church. We do not just come together in a church for worship and then leave, but we talk to other believers, we get to know them and their lives and their concerns. Then, beyond our fellowship, when we are not together, we can continue to think about them.

That means I am not always going to be thinking about myself, my life, my concerns, my struggles, and my joys. But, instead, I live the life and the joys and the questions and the struggles of other believers. And when I am done doing this for one individual whom God has put in my life, I go to the next one. Perhaps you can do this by going through your local church directory and think about and pray for each of the different

members. That is the calling here to consider one another. It is the ministry that you are called to in the body of Jesus Christ. God has put believers together in the body. All the members are there to help one another. They all need one another. And because we all need each other in the church, we must consider one another.

How much do you do that? How much do you prepare, as you go to worship with God's people, for meaningful conversation with them? How much do you think about other members in the church between Sundays? And when you *do* think about them, is it this loving and sympathetic consideration of them? We cannot be Christians and be selfish. That is the first thing here.

But then there is a purpose. This considering of one another leads to action—to provoke one another unto love and good works. To provoke someone is to incite them or motivate them or move them to action—to stir them up, to spur them on. We can think of a coach on a sports team. He provokes the team, he moves them, he motivates them. Or we can think of a good boss in the workplace who similarly motivates people.

Now, we can easily provoke people in the wrong way, by moving them to sin. For example, Ephesians 6:4: "Fathers,

provoke not your children to wrath.” That is, by injustice and bad example, a father can stir up resentment in his children to himself and, ultimately, to Christ. And all those in leadership and with authority must be very careful of this. This is something that any one of us can do. To change the words in the text to the opposite, we can incite or provoke others to hatred and evil works. We put pressure on them to sin by our conduct or lifestyle, by our conversation or by our sinful and divisive behavior.

But here in the text, it is put positively. Not only do we have a capacity to provoke others to sin, but, as Christians, to provoke to love and good works. Love is the outstanding characteristic of the Christian. We are to incite one another to love. Love is an action. In I Corinthians 13 love is described with fourteen different verbs or action words. Love is patient, kind, long-suffering, not easily provoked, not envious, not puffed up, and so on. Love is sacrificial. Love does not put itself first. We are to incite to love and to good works. This is really another way of saying the same thing. But the emphasis now is on sanctification, on living a holy life. And though the Bible does not teach salvation by good works, it does teach good works. And this is, in fact, the purpose of our salvation. Think, for example, of Titus

2:14: Christ “gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.” This is our place and ministry to fellow believers—to stir them up to love and to good works.

What a very encouraging thought for every Christian. Perhaps you have been the occasion for dragging someone down into sin in conversation or lifestyle. And you are discouraged about your place in the body of Jesus Christ and you want to withdraw from other believers. But now here we see that every one of us, as a believer, has not just a calling, but the ability to be a positive influence on other members of the body of Christ.

How do we do that in more practical ways? I want to give three different ways that we can do this. But, first I want to say this: You cannot effectively provoke others to love and good works if you do not first consider others. There are those two verbs in the text. And the second one follows the first. Before you can provoke others to good works, you have to be considerate of them. You have to love them, you have to sympathize with them, you have to understand them, you have to enter into their life.

I say this because often times there are in the church members whose only contribu-

tions in each of the cities that he visited. And then when we look at the New Testament we see that the majority of the books of the New Testament were written to local congregations or to men who pastored local congregations. And in many places these letters speak about how believers are to live their lives with each other in the local church and to seek the unity of the Spirit in the expression of the church in a local congregation. So believers were added to the local church. This speaks against individualism and against the idea so common today of home churching. You cannot simply dismiss the local church and say, “I can, as a Christian, belong to the universal body of Christ. I don’t need the local church.” In the New Testament, this is the third reason, believers were added to local churches.

Then, reason number four. A part of the biblical structure for the local church is the office of elder. The elder cannot function in his office without members in the church. In Hebrews 13:17 we read this: “Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you.” The rulers spoken of here in this verse are spiritual rulers, not civil rulers. They watch for your souls. In their care of

souls, they must give account to God. And so, to make their work enjoyable, more pleasant, and our life in the church more profitable, we are called to submit to them. These words are written to the same people who are exhorted in chapter 10:25 not to forsake the gathering of themselves together. So, a part of their gathering themselves together was that there was in the local church an organization, with elders who took oversight of the lives of the people who came together for worship. This implies membership.

So, when Paul organized the churches in his missionary journeys, he ordained elders in every city (Acts 14:23). Those elders are given in the Scriptures a specific duty with regard to the members of the church, not general duties for anyone and everyone who might visit a worship service as a visitor, but specific duties to watch over and to shepherd the souls of the flock. And now, without a commitment from an individual to the local church to obey and to submit to the men who were elders in that local church, it is impossible for elders to fulfill their duties.

Reason number four: As part of the biblical structure of the local church, there is the office of elder, and it cannot function without membership.

Reason number five. This one is closely connected to



Corinth, in Galatia, in Ephesus, in Philippi, and so on. And in Revelation, chapters 2 and 3, Christ Jesus pens the letters to the seven churches in Asia Minor. He is interested in those churches. His love for them is not limited to the cross, but it is an on-going care for His church in local institutions. This is a reason for us to be committed to the local church. Christ loves the church, so we should, too. In Acts 20:28, Paul says to the elders of Ephesus that the flock over which they were appointed as overseers, the congregation in Ephesus, that flock God had purchased with His own blood. Jesus loved that local church and He gave His life's blood for her. And, as Christians, we are called to love what Christ loves. If He loved the church so much that He gave Himself for her, then should we not also ourselves love and give ourselves to the church?

Reason number one: Jesus loves the church, so we should too.

Reason number two. The local church is a spiritual family. The husband of the church is Jesus Christ. And that means that all the other members of the church are His bride and are all spiritual brothers and sisters. We are, the Bible says, of the family and the household of God, with God as our Father. And now the question is: If you

have problems in your family or in your marriage, what is it that you do? How do you show your faithfulness to your spouse? Do you run from her? No, you stick together. And you work on things. And through this process you grow together, not only as husband and wife, but also as believers. And that kind of commitment that we would have in our families is the kind of commitment that we should have to other believers in the local church. If the church of Christ is a family, how could a true Christian go it alone? As a spiritual family, we need one another and we come together to Jesus Christ for family fellowship—spiritual food and spiritual fellowship.

Reason number two: the local church is a Christian family.

Reason number three. In the early history of the church recorded in the New Testament, those who were converted were brought into local congregations and were called, as Christians, to live their lives in the context of a local church with fellow believers. In Acts 2:47 we read that “the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.” Which church? Was it just the universal body? No, it was the congregation at Jerusalem.

And so Paul, when he went on his missionary journeys in the book of Acts, went out with the goal of establishing congre-

tion to the body and the lives of others is to go around rebuking other members. They never converse with others, they never enter into the situation of others. And yet, they are always ready to rebuke and to exhort. Yes, there is a place for rebuke and for exhortation between Christians. But this is in the context of love in the body. It needs to be tempered by a loving consideration of fellow members. Usually, rebuke and admonition do not go well in the church because it is not done in love. There is not first consideration. The truth may be spoken, but the truth is not spoken in love. For a good example, we could think of Jesus' own treatment of His disciples. Yes, He rebuked them, sometimes sharply, and it stung. He says to Peter: “Get thee behind me, Satan!” But He loved His disciples. He cared for their every need. And when He rebuked them, they understood His love. And they wanted to fix, to change, their behavior.

Or we think of Paul in I Thessalonians 2, where he says in verses 7 and 11 concerning his conduct at the church in Thessalonica: “We were gentle among you, even as a nurse cherisheth her children:...ye know

how we exhorted and comforted and charged every one of you, as a father doth his children.”

Now, what are the three ways by which we can provoke others to love and good works?

First, we can do this by our example. And it is important for us to remember that other believers are watching the way that we live. They want to see how we live so that they can learn from it. Paul says to Timothy in I Timothy 4:12: “Be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity.”

This being an example to others is not something that we necessarily do consciously. Not, I am going to teach others how they should live—they should live like me. But, as you live a life of godliness, first before God, others will see it and they will say, “Here is a man of

God. Here's a godly family. Here's a man and a woman who live in a godly way in their marriage. Here's a humble member in

the church. Here's a person of purity, a hard-working person, a man of commitment.” The way that you live your life and the way that you carry yourself as a Christian as you live first

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spiritually before the Lord will incite others to follow you. You provoke to love and good works by example.

Then, second, you can do this by encouragement. By that I mean you give support and confidence and hope and comfort to one another. You lift others up, you cheer them on. You positively reinforce spiritual growth in the other members of the church. Encouragement is something that we all need as Christians. Not flattery, but somebody coming alongside and saying, “I know what you’re struggling with. I see what you’re working through. I understand what you’re dealing with. I’ve considered you, and here, here are God’s promises, here is an encouraging word.” One way that we can encourage one another is to express appreciation to others. A person who never expresses appreciation is an inconsiderate person. So, children, young people, husbands—you thank your wife, your mother, for the work that she does in your home and your family. Then she is encouraged. Or you thank other members of the church or your pastor, or the officebearers who have led you in spiritual ways. You express appreciation. What an encouragement!

Think of all the times that Paul does this in the epistles that he writes to the churches.

He thanks God for the saints. He praises them for their strengths. Romans 1:8: “I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, that your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world.” I Corinthians 1:4: “I thank my God always on your behalf, for the grace of God which is given you by Jesus Christ.” Philippians 1:3: “I thank my God upon every remembrance of you. I Thessalonians 2:13: “For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because... ye received the word of God.” II Thessalonians 2:13: “We are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren.” How encouraging for these saints, these churches to which Paul is writing to persevere, to go on, to continue. They are provoked by his encouragement and appreciation.

Then, third, we provoke one another by love and good works by exhortation. Example, encouragement, and now exhortation. What is that? Sometimes, occasionally, it is confrontation and rebuke. But even then, it must be done in the context of deep friendship with other believers, of considering one another, of loving one another. And this is why it is important for believers to get together, to get together and fellowship with one another, apart from the formal worship of the church on the Lord’s Day. So we ought to have in the church Bible Stud-

admonition and also to church discipline should you become wayward in sin.

That, in a nutshell, is what church membership is. And in the rest of this message, I want to present the biblical argument for church membership. However, before I do that, there is one thing I want to say. I understand that there are in our listening audience many people who are in isolated circumstances. You would love to be a member of a church that is faithful to the gospel but there is no such church near where you live. And in His providence, God prevents you from moving to such a place where there is a church. To you I say this: Persevere in the truth. Do everything in your power to get yourself to a place where there is a church that is faithful to God’s Word. And remember, it is not good for the Christian to live in isolation. We need one another as believers.

In this message, however, I hope to speak especially to those who think that they do not need the church and who live quite independently as Christians even though there are faithful churches in their vicinity. Maybe this is you, and you say, “I just don’t see the

need for church membership. And when I go through the New Testament, I don’t see anywhere the idea and the requirement of formal membership.” That is really what I want to address today. And I want to give you six biblical reasons that you, as a Christian, should be a member of a local, faithful church.

Reason number one. Jesus Christ Himself loves and is interested in local churches. Now it is true that the word church in the New Testament *is* used in reference to the universal body of Christ. And the church is universal. It is not limited to any one place or time or people, but is worldwide and history-long. And it is true, too, that Christ’s love is for His universal church. She is His bride, and He lays down His life for her. But, even though all of that is true, that does not mean that it

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That is because the church in the New Testament, the word church, is also used in reference to local congregations. In fact, of the 110 or so times that word is used, about 90 times it is in reference to a specific local church. For example, the epistles are written to local churches in Rome, in

want to take this a step further and talk, not just about church attendance, but about church membership. I do that not because I think everyone should be a member of the church of which I am a pastor, or of the churches that we represent. But I do that because in the New Testament there is a definite structure and order set down for the local church, and this structure or organization is necessary not only for the church to give an effective witness and be visible and identifiable in the world, but also for the spiritual life and well-being of the individual Christian. In other words, the church is an organization that is essential to the life of every Christian. Every Christian should be a part of it through membership in a local congregation.

To be a member of a church is more than simply finding a church that you like and attending there regularly so that you get to know the other people who go to church there and become comfortable in that church setting. Many churches today offer something like that. No membership...just come...everyone is welcome...we have no discipline, no formal ties, and we offer the sacraments to all who think they are Christians...and we will not exercise

any censure of anything in your personal life.

When I speak of membership, and when the Bible speaks of membership, I mean formal membership in which you go through a series of classes or a preparation process to get yourself ready for membership. And in those classes and in that preparation you are instructed in all the main teachings of Scripture as that church holds them. Then you make an official request to become a member. And you are interviewed by the rulers, the elders in the church. You stand up and you publicly confess your

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And in that  
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church. And in formally becoming a member, you express your agreement with the teaching of the church that you are joining. You commit yourself to support the church financially. You vow to protect the unity of the local congregation. You show yourself willing and available to use your gifts in the church and to pursue the growth of the local church. And also, as you come to the elders to make your membership formal, you willingly place yourself under their spiritual care and oversight, expressing your readiness to submit to their

ies, or smaller groups to talk about the Word of God and its application to our lives. Then this becomes a means to spur one another on. Then, as we meet with one another around the Word of God, we are exhorting one another, we are saying, as is here in Hebrews 10: "Let us do this, let us do that," and we are provoking one another by our exhortations to love and to good works.

In a healthy church, in a healthy body of believers, this should be a part of our entire life and interaction with one another. When we have conversation with one another as believers about our work or about our family or about our marriage or about the raising of our children, then we are not just setting an example, but we are exhorting and encouraging one another.

For this to be done effectively in the church, there has to be a humility, a willingness to receive admonition from others. In this way we keep one another accountable as believers. And this avoids trouble and discipline and sin coming into the church.

So, as a Christian, whoever you are, this is your personal ministry. It involves other Christians whom God has put into your life, most likely the

ones that are part of the church where you are a member. Those other Christians are not perfect people. They are not necessarily the most fun people to be with. They might not always bring you joy. But God has put them in your life. They have needs, and you are to put them before yourself. You must deliberately set aside time to think about and to pray for these other Christians and then to encourage them and to thank them and to be an example to them, so that you may incite them to love and to good works.

Are you, as a Christian, doing your part for the rest of the body of Jesus Christ?

Let us pray.

Father, we thank Thee for the privilege we have to worship, and we thank Thee that in Jesus Christ we are brought into a body with other believers. Help us to understand that being saved and having blessings and having gifts is not first and primarily for our own personal advantage, but so that we may support others in the body of Jesus Christ. Help us to be considerate, to be good examples, and in this way to incite other believers to help one another along in the Christian life. We pray this for Jesus' sake, Amen.



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**THE REFORMED WITNESS HOUR**
*May 10, 2015*
*No. 3775*
*Our Ever-Living Intercessor*
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Dear Radio Friends,

**F**orty days after He arose from the dead, Jesus ascended bodily into heaven. The ascension of Jesus Christ is a source of great blessing to the church He has left behind on earth.

One of the great blessings of the ascension is that now Christ has sent His Holy Spirit into the church to regenerate His people and give them heavenly desires so that they seek the things that are above where Christ dwells.

Another blessing of the ascension is that it is a guarantee that our bodies will someday live in heaven. Christ is there in His real human nature as the first fruits, a promise to all who believe, that their vile bodies will be changed someday to be made like to His glorious body.

A third blessing of Christ's ascension is that He is in heaven today as our advocate and intercessor, appearing in the presence of God as our representative, so that He can bring to us here on earth the blessings and the grace of God.

It is this third benefit of Christ's ascension that we are

going to consider in this radio message, from the point of view of Hebrews 7:25, where God's Word says: "Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them."

The book of Hebrews compares in contrast the Levite priesthood of the Old Testament and the priesthood of Christ to show us that Christ is a superior high priest, that He is the fulfillment of the Old Testament priesthood. That comparison is here in the words "he ever liveth to make intercession."

To make intercession for another is to offer prayers to God in their behalf. One of the important duties of the priest in the Old Testament was to make intercession for the people. On the great Day of Atonement, the high priest would make a sacrifice for the people. And then, with the coals of the sacrifice, he would go into the inner sanctuary of the tabernacle or temple, where the ark of the presence of God was, and there he would make intercession for the people of God by burning

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**THE REFORMED WITNESS HOUR**
*May 31, 2015*
*No. 3778*
*The Necessity of Church Membership*
*Rev. Rodney Kley*


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Dear Radio Friends,

**W**e come today to our last message on this little section in Hebrews 10:19-25. The writer's aim in this section, and indeed in the entire book, is to encourage believers to persevere in their faith. His audience is made up of persecuted Jewish Christians who attempted to go back to Judaism. So he sets before them the supremacy of Christ and the great privilege that New Testament believers have of access to God through the blood of Jesus Christ.

We have labeled these verses "A New Testament Call to Worship," and we see that idea repeated in these verses several times. Verse 19 speaks of "boldness to enter into the holiest." Verse 22 says, "Let us draw near" to God. Verse 23: "Let us hold fast the profession of our faith." Verse 24: Let us consider one another." And, especially verse 25: "Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is." This is a New Testament call to Christians to join in the public and corporate worship of the church.

In our last message, which

was two weeks ago, we looked at verse 25 and talked about why, as Christians, we should go to church, or, in the words of the text, why we should not forsake the gathering of ourselves together. Over against the individualistic mentality of many Christians today, whose attitude often is: "I don't need the church and I don't need other believers. I can read the Bible myself and have an effective relationship with God"—over against that, we saw that the practice of the early New Testament believers, and the calling for believers in every age, was to gather for public worship on the first day of the week to pray, to bring their offerings, and especially to hear God's Word. Out of those gatherings the church, as the body of Christ in a local place, grows together. And so the writer here in Hebrews 10 also speaks of the fellowship of the saints: considering one another, provoking one another to love and good works, and exhorting one another—all of which are impossible if we do not attend worship together as fellow Christians.

Now in today's message, I

languages tells us not only that people from all nations will be saved and the Gentiles brought in, but it tells us also how this will take place. It will take place through the preaching of the Word and in the power of the Holy Spirit. Jesus had told His disciples to bring the gospel to all nations. They must have wondered, how will we—such a small group of people—do this? The answer was that the Holy Spirit would go with them and confirm their word and work. The Holy Spirit comes to give faith, to open hearts, to strengthen believers, to convert sinners. He is the power of God that accomplishes the preaching, to make it effectual, and to bring sinners to Christ.

As you look at the day of Pentecost, you see this happened immediately. One of the first results of the pouring out of the Holy Spirit was a sermon. Peter stood up and he boldly preached a message of sin and repentance and faith in Christ for salvation. And thousands were converted.

Today there is a resistance in the church to preaching. People want to replace preaching with entertainment and other things. But just think, what if Peter had not preached this sermon, if the Holy Spirit had not equipped the church this way, if Peter had not preached,

if the disciples had not gone out from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth preaching, if Paul had not gone on his missionary journeys? Then everything would have stayed right where it was that day in Jerusalem—a church of 120 who would have all died. That would have been the end of the church. But the result of the Spirit's coming was preaching. And the day of Pentecost started a storm, a shot that rang through all the earth, a spark that set the world on fire. And it all started with a sermon from Peter.

What did he preach? He preached sin and the Savior. He preached a sovereign God and the necessity of repentance and faith. This is the result of the Spirit's work. This is what the church today needs. Where the true gospel is preached, there the Spirit is present in the church today.

Let us pray.

Lord, give us the Spirit and hearts for the true gospel of salvation through Jesus alone. We give thanks for the Spirit who has come. And we pray that His powerful work will continue for the gathering of the church so that all things may be ready for the return of our Savior. In His name do we pray, Amen.

incense on the coals. The coals, which represented the sacrifice, were the foundation for the prayers that were represented in the incense. The incense was accepted by God because of the sacrifice.

This was a beautiful picture of our praying in Jesus' name. Today, God receives our prayers because of the death of Jesus Christ on the cross.

There are four points of contrast between the intercession of Christ and that of the Old Testament high priest that show us that Christ is superior.

First, the foundation for the intercession of the Old Testament priests was a repeated animal sacrifice, whereas the foundation for Christ's intercession is His death on the cross, which was an actual payment for sin made once for all times.

Second, the Old Testament high priest went only into an earthly building that represented the dwelling place of God, whereas Christ is gone into heaven, into the very presence of God Himself, as our intercessor.

Third, the Old Testament high priest himself was a sinner who needed a sacrifice to be made also for himself, whereas Christ is the sinlessly perfect Mediator.

And, fourth, the Old Testament high priests all died, passing their work on to the next

priest in line, whereas Christ ever lives to make intercession for us.

The text before us highlights this last, that Christ ever liveth to make intercession for us. These words should make us think of the resurrection of Christ. When Christ arose from the dead, it was not like the resurrection of Lazarus, who came back to this life and one day had to die again. No, Christ arose as our Savior to a victorious and everlasting life. And in that life He ascended into the presence of God where, we are told, He is still alive today and makes intercession for us.

Think about that. When He ascended into heaven about 2,000 years ago, Christ began to make prayers for the early church. And He has continued to pray for His people from that time, all through history, and into the present. He prayed for the church in her early growth. He prayed for her through the dark Middle Ages. He prayed for her at the time of the Reformation. And still today, He is praying for her. He will continue to pray for her till the end of time, when the church is gathered with Him in glory.

Because we have Christ as our heavenly intercessor, we need not and we should not pray to saints or angels. Hebrews 4 tells us that we can come boldly to Christ Himself because He

knows our situation. We should not think of Him as one beyond our reach but as one who is like us and who knows and understands us and so prays for us.

For whom does Christ make His heavenly intercession? The answer of the text is: “those who come unto God by him.” First, these words tell us that the intercession of Christ is not general but

particular. His prayers are not for all men, but for

those who come to God by Him, for believers only. In John 17:9 Jesus says, “I pray for them: I pray not for the world, but for them which thou hast given me.” John 17 identifies those for whom Christ prays as the elect, those whom the Father has chosen and given to the Son. Here in Hebrews 7 this group is identified as those who come unto God by Christ. To come unto God by Him is to believe on Jesus Christ. No one can do this except those who are drawn of the Father through faith.

Second, these words describe Christ as the only way of salvation, the only way to come to God. The only Mediator between God and man is the Man Christ Jesus. In Acts 4:12 Peter preached: “Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we

must be saved.” Jesus is the way, the only way.

And, third, these words tell us what God commands sinners to do. God’s command to all is to repent and to come to Him through faith in Jesus Christ. Do you, today, recognize Christ as the only way to God? Do you come unto God by Him? This means renouncing your-

self, recognizing your own sinful weakness, and trust-

ing only in Christ for salvation. It means looking and praying to God through Jesus Christ for daily strength in the spiritual battles of life. Christ is the supreme, the only, the all-sufficient Savior. He is the only way to the Father. As He Himself declared: “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No man cometh unto the Father but by me.”

For all who come to God by Christ, there is in the text a beautiful truth, a wonderful promise. This: “That he is able to save to the uttermost all who come to God by him.”

We want to spend the rest of this message unpacking the meaning of this. What does it mean that Christ is able to save to the uttermost all who believe?

The word “save” in the text refers to our salvation. There

What is it to be filled with the Holy Spirit? What is this experience? Well, it is the experience of salvation, of faith in Jesus Christ. When the Holy Spirit comes, He opens our eyes to believe the gospel, to believe as true all that God has revealed in the Scriptures. The Holy Spirit causes us to see the truth about ourselves, to see our sin and sinfulness, and to see Jesus Christ as the only way for us to be delivered from the hell that we deserve. The Holy Spirit makes us look to Christ and

trust in His cross for salvation. These signs at Pentecost were not so much for the 120 who received them. These were already saved. But these signs were for the multitudes. And they were recorded in Scripture for us and for our salvation.

What is the importance of these signs? What do they mean for us today?

First, they speak of the presence of God with His people in the New Testament church. Jesus promised as He was leaving: “Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world.” In the Old Testament, God was with His people in the cloud of

fire. But now He comes in a way far greater, far more real, far more powerful than He did then. Pentecost is the day of the fullness of the presence of God with His people. It is a day of the fullness of the covenant of God, God dwelling with His people.

That is what we should rejoice in as we remember

*The Holy Spirit causes us to see the truth about ourselves, to see our sin and sinfulness, and to see Jesus Christ as the only way for us to be delivered from the hell that we deserve.*

the coming of the Spirit—God is with His church and with His people, not as a blessing that comes in drips, but a full blessing, the Spirit is poured out into the church

today. Now we have the fullness of the revelation of God, not just the promises of Christ as they had in the Old Testament, but in their fulfillment in Jesus Christ. Now we have the whole of the Scriptures, we have the fullness of God in the ability of every Christian to pray on his own and to come to God. We have the fullness of God in the preaching of the gospel and in the church of Christ on the earth. The Spirit has come as the Spirit of God to dwell among us.

And, second, these signs are important because they tell us how the great commission will be fulfilled. The sign of the many

in these verses—not witnessed so much as experienced by the disciples. In the beginning of verse 4 we read, “They were all filled with the Holy Ghost.” If you turn back in your Bibles to the earlier promises of the coming of the Holy Spirit you find that various synonymous terms are used to describe this marvel. In Acts 1:5 we read of being baptized with the Holy Spirit; Acts 1:8, of the Holy Spirit coming upon you; Acts 2:38, of receiving the Holy Spirit; and here in the text, being filled with the Holy Spirit. All these refer to one and the same thing. They do not refer to some extraordinary second experience that comes to some Christians only, but to the coming of the Holy Spirit to all who believe in Jesus.

In the Old Testament, Moses expresses his desire and longing that all God’s people be filled with the Spirit and be prophets. In Numbers 11:29 he says, “Would God that all the LORD’s people were prophets, and that the LORD would put his spirit upon them!” The coming of the Holy Spirit is the fulfillment of this longing of Moses.

Paul says in I Corinthians 12:13, “By one Spirit are we all baptized into one body.” This is very important. There is a false teaching that is very popular today that divides Christians into two groups: those who are simply believers, and then the

more special group of those who have been baptized with the Holy Spirit. This teaching not only divides the church, but it puts the Holy Spirit above Jesus Christ and puts having the Holy Spirit above believing in Jesus and the gospel. We should not do that. Jesus says of the Holy Spirit in John 16:13, 14: “He shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come. He shall glorify me: for he shall receive of mine, and shall shew it unto you.” Jesus means by this that the Holy Spirit comes to bring the gospel of Christ and nothing else to *all* believers. On the day of Pentecost, they were all filled with the Holy Spirit.

It is important to see here, as well, that the Holy Spirit came sovereignly, that is, these disciples did not receive the Holy Spirit by opening their hearts to Christ. Verse 2 speaks of the Spirit coming suddenly. The idea is that He came sovereignly. And it teaches that for the work of salvation in our hearts we depend entirely on God and His grace. These disciples could do nothing to bring the Holy Spirit from heaven into their hearts. We can do nothing to open our hearts to the Holy Spirit. God does it. God saves you. He sovereignly, according to His will, comes into the heart of His elect people. And we must praise and thank God alone for salvation. It is not by human effort.

are two parts or two aspects to the saving work of Christ for His people. First, there is the salvation that Christ has completed for us in His death on the cross. By His death, He has paid the price for our sins and merited our salvation. We refer to this as justification. Second, there is the ongoing work of Christ in which He saves us daily from the struggles of life, particularly from being overcome by sin and its power. This is His work of sanctification and preservation.

The word “save” in the text refers to this second aspect of salvation. When it says “Christ is able to save us to the uttermost,” it means that He preserves and He sanctifies His people. By His continual intercession for us today, Christ continues to save us.

As our heavenly intercessor, Christ is praying for our sanctification and for our preservation. In His intercessory prayer in John 17, Jesus says, “Father, keep them,” and “Father, sanctify them.” Basically, His prayer is that God will continually pour out His blessing on His people in this world, that He will give them the grace that they need each day, that they will be filled with the life of Christ and be drawn more and more out of sin and death and into the light until they finally reach the glory of heaven. It is a prayer that God will keep us in this world.

Because of His intercession, Christ is able to save us to the uttermost. The words “he is able” are some of the most comforting words in Scripture for the true believer, because we recognize that we are not able. We are not able to save ourselves. We are not able to stand up against sin and temptation. We are not able to make ourselves holy. We are not able to persevere till the day of Christ. We are in the midst of a world of troubles and temptations. The enemies of Satan and the world and the flesh are very strong. And we are weak. In Romans 7 Paul looks at this and he says, “Oh, wretched man that I am. Who shall deliver me [that is, save me] from the body of this death?” We are not able. But He is able. Because He lives, and because He prays for us, He is able. When I am struggling with sin and temptation; when a fellow believer is in the midst of deep trials or wanders in the way of sin—who then will save me, who will save that fellow Christian? He is able!

And He is able to do this to the uttermost. That means completely. It refers to the quantity and the duration of the work of salvation. Christ does all of it. And He will continue to do it. He does everything. He will do all of it till we are perfected and come to glory. He will not stop saving those whom He has begun to save. As Philippians 1:6 says, “he which hath begun a



good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ.” To the uttermost, till the end, till it is finished. Whatever obstacles come my way, Christ is able to save me from them, to overcome them, so that I am saved.

To the uttermost. What are some of those obstacles?

First, Christ is able to save me from the guilt of all of the sins of my past, which continue to rise up in my consciousness. Those sins of my past can be an obstacle to my salvation. They can make me think that my salvation is impossible, that I am unworthy. But Christ stands before God with the blood of His finished sacrifice and He says, “Father, forgive them. Give to My child the peace of forgiveness.” He is able to save to the uttermost.

A second obstacle is my present weakness, my sinful shortcomings. I John 2 says, “If any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father.” My sinful nature remains with me, and it is a cause for constant struggle and doubt. I need daily repentance and humility because of it. But Christ is able to save me

from my sinfulness. He is able to save to the uttermost.

Third, He is able to save me through all the trials of my life. Every trial is a challenge to my faith and my salvation. Think of Job, who went through severe trial and was tempted by his wife to curse God and die. In all the trials of life Christ is able to save us because, as Paul says in II Timothy 1:12, “He is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day.” So long as He lives and He prays for me, there is no trial, no poverty, not sickness, not grief, not anxiety, not loneliness, not death—nothing that can separate me from my salvation.

He is able to save to the uttermost.

Fourth, He is able to save me from all of my persecutions. When a child of God is persecuted for his faith, when he is mocked and spoken evil of, Christ sees and He prays and He saves. He keeps us. Think of the death of Stephen the martyr by persecution. As he was being stoned, what did he see? He saw the living Jesus at the right hand of God, standing to

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was not strange incomprehensible gibberish, but as verses 8-12 make plain, foreign languages that could be understood by visitors to Jerusalem from other parts of the world. The miracle here was a miracle of speaking. The Holy Spirit gave to these disciples, quite suddenly, the ability to speak fluently in languages that they had never learned before. Just imagine that—if suddenly you had the ability to speak fluent Chinese or fluent Portuguese or some other very difficult-to-learn language. This was the miracle here.

And it is deeply significant. The people listed in verses 8-12 who heard the disciples speak in their own language were the Jews of the dispersion who knew Hebrew and Greek, but also had a local language where they lived. And now the disciples were preaching the gospel to them in their local language. The origin of all the different languages of the world from the Old Testament is Babel, where God cursed mankind with confusion of languages—so that different ethnic groups could not understand one another. And the world was divided into nations. Now, in this sign of speaking in tongues, God is saying that the coming of the Spirit in a sense reverses that curse or overcomes it. How difficult it is not to be able to understand and communicate with a foreigner. But now God brings one language to

the earth—for all the nations of the earth—and that is the language of the gospel of grace, the gospel of sin and pardon. The different languages still exist. But the gospel is preached in all the languages of the earth, to all the nations of the earth, as God gathers a universal church from the ends of the earth.

This sign of the Holy Spirit’s coming speaks of the New Testament age as a period of missions and of the spread of the gospel. After Christ ascended into heaven, the Holy Spirit comes to equip the church to bring the gospel to the ends of the earth, so that, through this preaching, God’s elect people from every nation may hear and believe the message of Christ. The sign of speaking in tongues is not intended as a personal blessing to this or that individual. But it is a sign for all the church and for all believers in all ages.

And at the same time, this sign is really a message to Israel and the Jews, that they are no longer the special people of God, but that they, with all the other nations of the earth, must find their salvation by believing the gospel of Christ. Paul says in Romans 11:25, that blindness in part is happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles be come in. Now in the New Testament, God works in all nations to gather His people.

There is one more miracle

man's heart. The Holy Spirit comes to create a new life in the sinner. If any man is in Christ Jesus, he *is* a new creature. And so, though the Holy Spirit is invisible, like the wind, and you cannot see Him, yet, where He comes you can see what He does. He changes a person from being a servant of Satan and sin to being a willing servant of God who lives in holiness. This is the power of the Holy Spirit.

The second sign is mentioned in verse 3, where we read: "And there appeared unto them clo-

ven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of

them." First the disciples hear something. Now the disciples see these strange, tongue-like fiery objects that come down on each of them. What exactly happened, we cannot explain from the text. But the important thing again is the comparison. We have a sign of fire—a sign that compares the Holy Spirit to fire. Fire in the Bible is a symbol of the holy presence of God. God led His people through the wilderness by a cloud of fire that represented His power and His presence. Also, Hebrews 12:29, "Our God is a consuming fire," the idea being that God is pure and perfectly holy. And so He responds to sin by burning it away in His wrath. Fire has a purifying effect and the Spirit,

who is called the Holy Spirit, comes to purify and to make holy.

And then notice as well that the fiery tongues rested on each of them. In the Old Testament, the presence of God was confined in the cloud to one physical location—first in the tabernacle and later in the temple. But now, under the New Testament, every believer becomes a temple and dwelling place of the Holy Spirit. God's fellowship with His people is worldwide. As Jesus tells us in

John 4:21, "The hour cometh, when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father"...

but in spirit and in truth, for "God is a Spirit," and comes in spirit. In the Old Testament the saints went to worship God in the temple. In the New Testament, the Spirit comes to each one so that we can worship Him in churches all over the world. We can worship Him in our homes, in our closets, and anywhere because we worship God in our hearts. We are the temple of the Holy Spirit.

The third sign witnessed by these disciples was tongue-speaking. In verse 4: "They began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance." A tongue here is a language. What was heard here

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receive him. He is able to save to the uttermost.

Fifth, because He lives as my heavenly intercessor, He is able to save me from every temptation. When we are tempted as believers, we may lose many things. But one thing we will not lose is our salvation. I know a man who, for a crime, went to prison. He lost everything, everything he had, including family and possessions. But through it all his faith has become stronger. Jesus says to Peter in his temptation, "Satan has desired to have you, but I have prayed for thee that thy faith fail not." That was an effectual prayer. He is able to save to the uttermost.

Sixth, He is able to save us from the bitter enemy of death. "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for Thou art with me." We all must face death. Our loved ones must be taken from us in death. But Christ ever lives, making intercession for us. And because He never dies, the sting of death is gone. He will save us through death. He is able to save to the uttermost.

And, seventh, He will save us from the terrors of the Judgment Day. "Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect?...Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh

intercession for us" (Rom. 8:33, 34). Because He makes intercession for us we need not fear any condemnation. There can be no judgment brought against God's elect. He is able to save to the uttermost.

This means that Christ will save us to all eternity. He will always be our priest before God. We can live only by the grace of God. Christ will continually present Himself to God, so that God's grace and God's blessing come to us.

He ever lives to make intercession for us. And so we shall be saved to the uttermost. Every obstacle to our salvation He is able to overcome. Here you have the beautiful truth of the preservation of the saints. Christ today is actively living and working to save His people by interceding in their behalf.

This is one of the great blessings of the ascension of Jesus Christ. And what a comfort it is for all those who come unto God by Him.

Let us pray.

Father, what a Savior we have. Father, we thank Thee for giving Thy Son. We praise Thee that today He still lives for us, to keep us living for Him, and finally, to bring us to Him in glory. We pray, keep us from every obstacle to our salvation until that day comes. In Jesus' name, Amen.

## THE REFORMED WITNESS HOUR

May 17, 2015

No. 3776

*Why Go to Church?**Rev. Rodney Kleyn*

Dear radio friends,

Today we open our Bibles and consider God's Word in Hebrews 10:25. I intend to treat this verse in two messages—today looking at the calling that comes to every Christian regularly to attend a church that is faithful to God's Word, and then, in our next message on this verse, which will be two weeks from today, we will look at the calling that every Christian has to be a member of a local church. So today we will talk about why it is important to *attend* church, and the next time why it is necessary to be a *member of* a church.

I am convinced that in the day and age in which we live there is hardly a more important and relevant message for Christianity. I say that because Christianity today is marked by the evils of consumerism and individualism. What is consumerism? Someone who calls himself a Christian says, "I'm going to shop around for a church until I find one that meets all my felt needs and that is pleasing to me." And the churches become "seeker-sensitive," so that they cater to what people *want* it to be, rather than being what

God says it should be. What is individualism? It is this, that the Christian says, "My life is my business. It's about me and my God. I don't need the church. And I certainly don't need other people to tell me what they think the Bible says about my life and how I should live." So, again, the church caters to this by getting rid of all formal membership and there is no discipline of sin anymore, there is no accountability. Communion? The sacraments are open to anyone and everyone and there is tolerance for every lifestyle and confession in the church.

Over against these evils, the Bible calls every believer to find and regularly attend the scheduled meetings for worship in a local church that is faithful to the Scriptures. As Christians, we do not have the option of "going-it alone." And, the standard for finding a church is not what makes *me* happy as an individual, but faithfulness to God's Word.

That is what we have in the text for today's message. Hebrews 10:25: "Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves

gift that they brought to God represented the plenty that was to follow in the harvest.

It was no accident that the Holy Spirit came on the day of this great feast. Verse 1 says, "When the day of Pentecost was fully come." The idea is that this was the fulfillment of the Old Testament feast. In fact, it is very likely that the disciples were expecting the Holy Spirit to come on this very day. For we read: "They were all with one accord in one place." There was an expectancy in their gathering. Jesus had told them to go to Jerusalem and wait for the promise of the Spirit. And in obedience now, they are waiting on this day for the Holy Spirit.

The event that is recorded in these verses is an amazing and breathtaking event. It was a miracle. And it was real. The disciples did not see a vision. It was something that happened within the realm of their experience. They saw, they heard, and they felt the coming of the Holy Spirit.

There were four things that the disciples, gathered that day, experienced, all of which were signs of the Holy Spirit. We call them "signs of Pentecost." They are signs because each of them tells us something about the Holy Spirit and the work that He comes to do as He is poured into the church.

As you read these verses,

you get the impression that Luke struggles to find words to describe this event. Something extraordinary has happened. And the best that Luke can do is make comparisons to the ordinary. Throughout these verses he keeps saying, "It was like this," or "It was like that," like wind and like fire, but it was not wind and it was not fire. It was more than just that.

The first sign is mentioned in verse 2, where we read: "And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting." This was not a wind storm. But it was the sound of wind, the sound that a tornado would make—louder than a hundred-mile freight train coming past. The word for "spirit" in the Bible literally means "wind" or "breath." In John 3:8 Jesus compares the Spirit and His coming to the wind. He says, "The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit." This sign, this comparison of the Spirit to wind, points to the sovereign power of the Holy Spirit—a creative, life-giving power as well as a destructive, killing power. The Holy Spirit comes to destroy the power of sin in a person, to conquer Satan, to drive him from the throne of a

### THE REFORMED WITNESS HOUR

May 24, 2015

*The Pouring Out of the Holy Spirit*

No. 3777

Rev. Rodney Kleyn

Dear Radio Friends,

Today we are going to talk about one of the greatest events in the history of the world—the pouring out of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost as recorded in Acts 2:1-4. Comparatively, there is no event in all the history of the world that has had such a profound and long-lasting effect on humanity. We can think of important dates when world-changing events have occurred. We can think of great inventions that have changed the way things are done and the way we live. We can think of names of great and influential people. But all these are nothing compared to the day of Pentecost.

We can even think of great biblical events like the creation of the world, the fall of man, the call of Abraham, the deliverance of Israel from Egypt, the conquest of Canaan, and, in the New Testament, the birth of Christ, His baptism, His ministry, His suffering and death, His resurrection and ascension—all very important events. But there is no event so profoundly influential on mankind as Pentecost. Christ's own birth, ministry,

death, resurrection, and ascension were limited to Galilee and a period in history. But in Pentecost, we have the entrance of God Himself into the world of man to be with us till the end of time. And what a profound effect that has had on the history of the world.

It is this great event that we want to look at from Acts 2:1-4. In verse 1 we read: "And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place." The word "Pentecost" simply means "the fiftieth day," that is, the fiftieth day after the Passover. And on this important day in the Old Testament a feast was celebrated—the Feast of Firstfruits. This was one of seven annual feasts in the Old Testament. It was a day in which the saints of the Old Testament celebrated the beginning of the harvest season by bringing a gift to God that represented the first things taken from the field in the harvest. It was a day in which the Israelites celebrated the abundance that God would give them from their fields. It was a day of promise. The little

together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another; and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching." I want to consider this under two main headings: First, what does this mean? and second, why is this necessary?

The book of Hebrews, you remember, was written to early Jewish believers, who, because of persecution, were tempted to go back to Judaism. In this epistle and, especially in the few verses here that we have been looking at, the writer issues a stirring call to his audience to continue in their faith in Christ. After reminding them of the great privilege of the free access to God that we have through the blood of Jesus Christ (vv. 19-21), he gives three exhortations. First, let us draw near to God, that is, let us worship. Second, let us hold fast to our faith, that is, persevere, do not give up. And, third, let us consider one another and provoke to love and good works,

that is, let us stay with one another as Christians. Apparently, though, there were some who had already departed from the faith.

And their departure showed itself this way, that they forsook the regular gatherings of the church for worship. That had

become a discouragement to those who remained and more were tempted to follow them. After all, being a persecuted Christian was difficult. So, in the text, the exhortation is to "not forsake the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is."

The meaning here is very clear and simple. It could not be put in plainer words. The words "assembling of ourselves together" refer to the gathering of Christian believers for worship and exhortation in a particular place. Those words refer to the regularly-scheduled meetings of the local church. Gathering regularly with the other believers for worship was the practice of the early New Testament church. And it has been the practice of the church down through the ages. This is what Christians do. They gather with other believers in order to worship God and to pray and to hear God's Word and to

receive the sacraments together. The practices of home-churching and the individualistic idea of

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Christianity that it is just me and my God are foreign to the Scriptures. Instead, we read this of the early believers in Acts 2:41, 42: "Then they that



gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls. And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers." There is no individualism there. The word that they had received was the word preached by the apostles who represented the church. Having believed, they came to the church to be baptized. Then they were added to the church. And then, as members of the church, they continued "stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine," that is, under their teaching and in fellowship, that is, their new friends were other Christians, and in breaking of bread and prayer, that is, the public use of the sacraments and in corporate prayer with other Christians. They did not say, "Now that we are Christians, we can just stay at home and do Christianity our own way."

I want to add here that though there is nothing wrong or sinful in Christian radio, or in the use of the Internet to access Christian resources, those things can be used in a wrong way when we substitute church with radio or Internet. Technology is not evil. But it should not be used as an excuse to stay away from public worship. And it should not be used as a means to isolate oneself as a Christian. "Not forsaking the assembling of

ourselves together as the manner of some is." The practice of the early New Testament church in gathering for worship is a pattern and an example for Christians today.

Here are a couple more examples from Scripture. In Acts 20:6, 7 we read this (Luke is writing and he says): "And we sailed away from Philippi after the days of unleavened bread, and came unto them to Troas in five days; where we abode seven days. And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them, ready to depart on the morrow; and continued his speech until midnight." Here the missionary, Paul, arrived in Troas on Monday or Tuesday. Then, on the following Sunday, the first day of the week, all of the disciples in that area, came together to break bread. This was their regularly scheduled meeting for worship. Already early in the New Testament church they gathered on Sunday, the Christian Sabbath and not the Jewish Sabbath, which was Saturday. They came together for what? To break bread, that is, for the administration of the Lord's Supper. And they came together to hear the preaching of the gospel. This day they had a guest preacher with them—missionary Paul. This is the kind of meeting that our text has in mind when it is talking about

the day approaching." There is an urgency. In the last days we need each other more than ever. And are we not living in these days? Does not wickedness abound today? Do we not see more and more opposition to the Christian faith? Is it not becoming more and more difficult in some parts of the earth, because of persecution, for believers to get together for worship? And then, all the more, we need to gather with the church.

So, this is God's Word for you today: Do not neglect the church. Do not say, "I'll go it alone as a Christian." Do not say, "There are other things that are more important to me or more interesting to me than worshiping with God's people." Do not say, "It's too difficult, there's too much opposition, or I don't get along well with other Christians." No, stay with Christ. Stay with the gospel. Stay with His people, for there is your strength in the evil days that lie ahead. As he said in verse 23: "Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering."

So, this is why we need to go to church. It is not just being there as a warm body to fill a pew or to increase the volume of the singing or to put money in the collection plate for some ministry. But this is something that we need: we need each other so that we may be found faithful in the day of Jesus Christ.

Let us pray.

Lord our God, keep us, we pray, by Thy Word. Preserve us in our commitment to the church of Jesus Christ and to other believers. And, Lord, for those listening today who have not a place in the church, who cannot find a faithful church, open the way for them to find true fellowship with other believers around Thy Word for the sake of their souls. For those who have forsaken the church, Lord, soften their hearts. Bring them back into the fold. And keep Thy church, we pray, in the evil days in which we live, till the day of Jesus Christ. We pray this, for Jesus' sake, Amen.

God's Word in the preaching of the gospel, it is impossible for us to exhort one another. But when we do come together, when we become familiar with each other as Christians and when we share one another's struggles and get to know one another's weaknesses and personality, then we can effectively exhort one another. We sit together in worship under the same Word of God. Then we can walk out of church and we can say to one another, "Did you hear God's Word? Did you hear the promises? Did you hear the encouraging truth? Did you hear the gospel that stirs us up to godly living?" And, you see, in this way God's Word binds us together as we gather together in public worship.

I imagine that after Paul preached in Troas all through the night and then left the next morning, that the saints there exhorted one another and encouraged one another from Paul's sermons for a very long time following.

So we come together to exhort each other, to hear and to speak to each other the Word of God. And, you see, if you sit at home or if you neglect worship for some other interest or some other activity, you miss out on this. And then you miss out on the communion of the saints. That is not good. If I cut off circulation to one of the

members of my body, it is not going to last too long. We need each other as believers.

And that brings us to the other reason in the text. Why should we not neglect the public gatherings of the church? Why are they necessary? He says, "So much the more, as ye see the day approaching." The day he speaks of is the day of the return of Jesus Christ, the day when He will come on the clouds of heaven in judgment and salvation.

Now the text here is not so much interested in that day itself, but rather the approach to that day, what leads up to that day. So he says we see that day approaching. What he is saying is this, that as the day of Jesus Christ gets closer, things in the world will get worse and worse for Christians. Jesus tells us in the gospels that there will be a great falling away, a time of intense persecutions such as was never before seen in history. And there is a build-up to this as history progresses. As the day of Jesus Christ approaches, we see these things more and more. There is an increase of wickedness. There is more and more opposition to biblical Christianity. There is an increase in persecution. And seeing these things, the writer says, gives us greater reason to gather with other believers. "So much the more," he says, "so much the more, as ye see

not forsaking the gathering of ourselves together—public worship, on the Lord's Day, to hear God's Word and to receive the sacraments.

Here's another passage, I Corinthians 16:1, 2. This passage highlights another, different, important element of worship for the church. We read here: "Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given order to the churches of Galatia, even so do ye. Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come." Here Paul is talking about collections for the poor. And he says that on the first day of the week they should set this money aside. Why does he tell them to do this on the first day of the week? Because that is when they gathered for public worship. These collections were a part of that worship. And this is the way things were set up—not just in Corinth, but in all the churches of Galatia. So again, you have the church gathering for public worship on a set day.

And now, in Hebrews 10:25, in the negative, believers are urged not to neglect these public gatherings for worship. The writer is saying, "There are responsibilities that you have toward the local church. And one of them is that you show up for worship with other believ-

ers; that you participate in this aspect of the life of the church."

Why would Christians stay away? Maybe that is a question for you to answer for yourself if you are not regularly gathering with God's people in worship. We see here in Hebrews that already forty or so years after the ascension of Christ, some who profess to be Christian had already developed a habit of not attending regular, weekly meetings for worship. Why? The text itself does not say. But elsewhere in the New Testament, and from some early church literature, we can glean some reasons. Some feared persecution from the Romans. Others bowed to the pressure from Jewish family and friends and they put their family and friends above worship. It is very likely that some were embarrassed by the smallness of their Christian congregations in comparison to the large and well-attended Jewish synagogues. Still others had business engagements on the first day of the week, the Lord's Day. And others were simply spiritually lazy. Now, none of those are mentioned in the text here. That is because none of them are legitimate reasons for the neglect of public worship. But I mention them because in our day of consumerism and individualism, these are the exact reasons that people will give for neglecting to gather with God's people in worship.

You see, there is nothing new under the sun. Some today will say, “The church is so small, I might just as well stay at home with my family.” Others will call Sunday a “family day” and they will put family above worship. Still others will let work and business interests trump

the worship of God. And some are just spiritually lazy—“Sunday is my day; I sleep in on Sundays. It’s the only day I can do it. Going to church is too demanding. The people there are difficult. If I have nothing else to do, I’ll be there. I don’t have to be in church to be a Christian.”

And all of this that you will hear among Christians today reveals a dreadful understanding of the Bible’s teaching on the church. Instead of seeing the church as the chief instrument through which God administers His grace to His people, and instead of seeing the gathering of believers as a coming together of the body of Christ and the members of that body so that, as Christians, we can be a strength and encouragement to one another, the attitude is: “I don’t really need the church. Other Christians will survive, they’ll be fine without me.”

But the Bible teaches very clearly that the church should be considered as a *body* that is made up of many different members. Each member is

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essential, and each member has a gift that he must contribute for the sake of the other members. So we ought not neglect the gathering to-

gether of the church for worship on the Lord’s Day.

Why not? Why is it necessary to gather in worship? This is my second main point in the message.

There are many reasons. The most important one is this, that we need to hear the preaching of God’s Word. When we talk about worship and the gathering of believers for worship, then we must understand that God’s Word and the preaching of God’s Word is the main part of worship. The church is not a club of people who share a similar interest. Believers do not gather to be entertained. Nor is church simply a time for a motivational speech. But, in worship, we draw near to the God who has first come to us. He came in His Son. He has opened the way. And now He comes to us in the gospel. Paul says of this gospel and the preaching of this

gospel in Romans 1:16 that “it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth.” In Romans 10 he tells us that unless we hear the preaching of the gospel, we cannot call on God in order to be saved.

And, with that in mind, it is important that, as believers, we find a church that proclaims and is faithful to God’s Word, that preaches the truth. If we love God’s Word in truth, if we love Christ and the gospel, then we cannot be happy just anywhere, in any

group of people that calls itself a Christian church. But we need to find a church where the gospel of salvation for sinners

through the blood and sacrifice of Jesus Christ is proclaimed and where the sovereignty of God is declared in predestination and in the work of salvation.

And let me add this here. That is really the purpose of our radio ministry on the Reformed Witness Hour. We do not do this as a substitute for church, but it is intended to help you, our listeners, grow in your understanding of the gospel and of the truth so that you will be equipped to seek out and find a church that is faithful to God’s Word.

So, we have here the primary reason that we need to attend church, so that we can receive the Word of God, which is spiritual food for our souls, to save us, and to keep us in the faith.

That reason is not actually mentioned here in Hebrews 10:25. But it does stand behind the two reasons that are here. Two other reasons are given. First, so that we can exhort one another, and, second, because we are living in the last days. “Not

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forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is;

but exhorting one another; and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.”

We need to exhort one another. This is really a repetition of what was said in the previous verse. Here is one way that we (as verse 24 has it) “provoke one another unto love and to good works.” We do this by exhorting one another. And, you see, unless we come together, unless we get to know one another as fellow believers in a local church, unless we spend time together, unless together we hear the instruction and admonition of