

Baptism and Membership Service of Dennis Beery, Billi Beery, Michael Rarick

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Preacher: Aaron Hoak

[0:00] Come and listen, all you who fear God, let me tell you what He has done for me. We are going to allow these three to come and tell us what God has done for them.

Dennis, Berry, come share with us. My first experience with a Christian environment was when my parents decided to attend the First Baptist Church here in Bremen.

I guess they thought it would be a good idea if their kids had some sort of exposure to God, though my folks' own conversion was still many years off. My memories of that experience are rather hazy, though I remember Sunday school being fun and the minister preached about hell a good deal of the time.

We attended there for a few years and then for whatever reason we stopped. My mom was raised a Catholic and I suspect she began to get fed up with Baptist preaching. At any rate, my family didn't attend anywhere for a number of years and we received no real Christian training at that time.

We all assumed God's existence and we all tried to live the kind of moral values we thought would make Him happy. Somehow in the early 70s we became associated with Community Gospel Church.

[1:12] I don't recall exactly how the initial connection was made, though it probably came through my younger sister Gloria. I attended fairly regularly, starting in 1973, though I mostly kept to myself, which, as it turned out, was not a good idea.

In 1974, I came to Christ sometime near my 20th birthday. You'll excuse me if the details are a little hazy. I'll explain the reason for that later.

I do remember being convicted by something Pastor Bob preached about and then standing when he asked if anyone wanted to acknowledge Christ as their Savior.

I counseled once with him about baptism and was later baptized in the church. The following year, my Christian life took a serious detour as I became involved in Herbert W. Armstrong's Worldwide Church of God cult.

As with all cults, the WCG, as it was known, tended to attract loners and people who are somewhat insecure. I was both of those.

[2:16] The church was also very exclusive. In other words, it believed it was the only true church. All other churches were what we referred to as this world's churches.

Of course, that included Community Gospel Church. As a result, I began to look upon my conversion and baptism as being invalid, since it did not occur within God's true church, where God's true doctrines were taught.

Therefore, I was re-baptized in 1976 and became an official member of the church. I spent many years at Worldwide believing that my coming to Christ and being baptized at Community Gospel was of no value, which is why some of the details of that event are a bit hazy.

I was attending IUSB at the time. I became a member of the WCG, and I decided that a worldly education was not what I wanted. So I applied to the church's Ambassador College in Pasadena, California, and attended there for a year, after which I got sidetracked by a young lady back in Indiana, whom I began dating and then a year later married.

About four months after our wedding, Billy and I packed up everything we owned into my 1975 Ford Pinto and headed out to Pasadena so I could continue my education.

[3:37] I graduated in 1982 with a B.A. in theology. It was my intention to work in some capacity for the church, which I did, working in the college's letter answering department.

Working in that capacity involved a lot of research, and it was during those months of extensive research that the first seeds of doubt about the Worldwide Church of God and their doctrines began to take root.

Shortly after that, as the result of a major budget cut, the church had to let go nearly everyone they hired out of my graduating class, me included. We packed up and moved to Florida, and then a year and a half later back to Indiana.

In 1986, the WCG's founder, Herbert W. Armstrong, died. In the years that followed, the new church leadership engaged in a critical analysis of the church's beliefs, a process that I followed with great interest.

By 1994, this process culminated in some major doctrinal shifts in the church, which brought the church more in line with Orthodox Christianity. It also split the church right down the middle, and our local congregation in Elkhart was no exception.

[4:51] With our pastor resisting the changes and rumors and backbiting becoming the rule of the day at church, we could learn little of the changes there. So Billy and I, praying for wisdom and direction from the Lord, studied the church's printed material at home.

What impressed us most was the church's now correct understanding that we are saved by grace alone, without works. The church previously believed that we must continue to qualify for salvation by keeping various Old Testament rules and special days.

This new understanding was like a breath of fresh air to us, because we were always struggling with guilt and fear, wondering if we were pleasing God sufficiently to get into his kingdom.

It eventually dawned on me that the WCG was now little different from many of the Christian denominations that I had so foolishly repudiated 20 years earlier.

And so I once again began to reckon my conversion from the day that I accepted Christ at Community Gospel. Our pastor eventually left, taking half the local congregation with him, and a new pastor was brought in who taught the church's now correct understanding of the gospel.

[6:04] The church members, however, seemed so worn out by the long struggle within the congregation that they seemed to have little life left for planning how to advance the gospel or make an impact in the community.

So in 2000, I finally left the WCG after 25 years. Some close friends of ours suggested a large church in Goshen that Billy and I might want to check out.

At first, we were impressed because there seemed to be a lot of life there, especially when compared to the congregation we had just left. But it wasn't long before that church began going headlong into seeker sensitivity, which Billy and I became less and less comfortable with.

Ironically, it was in that church that I became acquainted with Reformed theology about three years ago. Billy and I became more and more disillusioned by the direction of our church, and last year, 2005, I began looking for a new church home.

I remember my mother and sister once mentioning that the Heenies had begun a Reformed Baptist church, so I contacted Pastor John, and here we are. I've often wondered why God ordained that I would take a rather strange and circuitous path to grace fellowship when Summit Community Gospel made the transition directly.

[7:23] One obvious blessing of that experience, of course, was my wife and sons, whom I dearly love. Equally important, however, was the fact that I probably would not have fully appreciated God's tremendous grace and His complete sovereignty over all things as more fully revealed in Reformed theology if I had not first gone through these experiences, the experience in the WCG of trying to win God's acceptance by my own efforts at keeping laws, rules, and regulations, and then later the experience of being in a church where much of God's sovereignty was overruled by seeker-sensitive methodologies.

So by the grace of God, I am back among a number of the brethren with whom I begun my Christian journey, and it is my hope that I might finish that journey here as a member of Grace Fellowship.

Billy, come share your testimony. Most of my life was growing up in a home professing to be Christian, but was actually a works-based religion.

Much of what I learned was about Old Testament laws and many added requirements to be a godly person. I think back and much was taught about Old Covenant, the law, Old Testament days, and customs.

My basic beliefs were based on obeying the Lord out of fear. I wanted to save my own skin from eternal death. In spite of these many misunderstandings I had about God's requirements, I was always taught from an early age that the consequences for my sin was death, and that I needed to confess my sin and be baptized in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

[9:06] One verse I was taught from an early age was found in James 1.5, which says, If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him.

I found myself asking the Lord often to give me wisdom, even as a very young person. It was during my late teenage years I realized my lifestyle was leading down the path to complete unhappiness and destruction.

Many of my close friends had made terrible mistakes, causing great grief for themselves and their families. I can remember one evening while being very ill with mono and strep throat, living by myself, that I just cried out and asked the Lord to forgive me.

I knew it would take the help of the Holy Spirit to get out of the mess I was caught up in. At that time, I realized I needed a complete change of friends and lifestyle if I wanted a long life.

So at the age of 19, following the counseling with my pastor, I eventually was baptized in immersion in the fall of October of 1978 in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit into the church I had grown up in.

[10:11] As I think back on that time, I didn't realize yet all that God had planned for me as a result of my prayer for true wisdom and understanding. I know it was through this prayer that he eventually led me to church to a much more complete understanding of forgiveness and grace.

At that time I came to Christ, I believed that Jesus had freely forgiven all of my sins. But because I had been reared from my youth in a works-oriented belief system, I always struggled with guilt, wondering if I was doing enough to please him.

It wasn't until many years later that the Lord brought me and my husband to a better understanding of grace. It was a flow change which took many months of reading and searching. It was during that time that the local church we were attending split over these very life-saving doctrines.

I remember being just amazed at the understanding of the Trinity, which our church had formally rejected. Also, it was a relief to find out I didn't need to continue to qualify for salvation through works.

I was finally free to truly rejoice and grow in the knowledge that salvation was a finished work, truly a gift from the Lord made possible by the sacrifice of his son, Christ Jesus.

[11:21] Also, it was a painful time because many close friends and some of my family did not come to the same understanding of grace that the Lord eventually revealed to Dennis and me. I am thankful that the Lord allowed us to come to the truth together.

It was a blessing. In September of 2000, Dennis and I started attending a large evangelical free church in Elkhart. One of the teachings of that church is that Christ died for everyone, not just for those who were his elect.

In their view, God wants to see everyone saved, but it is ultimately up to each individual to make a decision to come to Christ. Instead of affirming that all people are spiritually dead, they seem to feel that there is some little bit of spiritual life and goodness in each person that could be appealed to, and then that person can make a decision for Christ.

However, in my line of work, where I deal with people who have made a decision to live outside of the law, I occasionally cross paths with people who can only be described as psychotic. These people have absolutely no conscience about law-breaking.

If they obey any law, it is not out of goodness, but because obedience happens to benefit them more at that particular moment than disobedience. Studies show that such people have no concept of right or wrong, and therefore no goodness that could be appealed to in order to lead them to Christ.

[12:42] I have looked into the eyes of such people and seen only deadness. This experience led me to question how God could base salvation on our own personal decisions, when some people, because of their obvious lack of any goodness, would not be capable of making a sincere decision for Christ.

Unless, of course, God first changed his or hers heart and mind. But if our church's teachings were true, why would God give some people that advantage and not others?

The only possible reason or answer was the biblical one, that we are all spiritually dead and all need the advantage of God, awakening us from the dead so that we can see his truth and finally come to him in faith.

I came to see that it takes a miracle, not our decisions to bring us to Christ. This experience helped me to begin to understand the doctrines of grace, though I admit I have much to learn yet.

At the same time this was happening, Dennis and I were becoming disenchanted with the direction our church was heading, into seeker sensitivity. Dennis began thinking about moving on to a new church, but all I could think about, in spite of our church's change in direction, was the prospect of leaving all the close friends I had made at church over the last five years.

[14:00] When he made the decision to visit Grace Fellowship, I came along, but not with a lot of enthusiasm. It was a long drive and I didn't know anybody. Even after visiting a few times, it was hard because of the distance not to feel like an outsider.

But the Lord was not yet through answering that prayer, from my youth for wisdom and understanding. I don't know how to describe it, but I felt a prompting by God's Spirit to continue to accompany Dennis to Grace Fellowship, that this is where the Lord wanted me.

The fact of the matter is, I was learning a great deal at Grace Fellowship about God's grace, His psalm entry, and how that affects all aspects of our lives. I was being spiritually fed as I had never been elsewhere.

The people at Grace Fellowship seem very devoted to their life in Christ, and I was very impressed to see how the children are taught the scriptures, both at home and at church, instead of coming here and being treated to a steady stream of activities as that happened in our previous churches. I know that a major part of my growing in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ is being committed to a local body of believers. In all honesty, I've been concerned about how to serve this church from a distance, but I know that God is able to work out all things for our benefit and His glory, so I look forward to seeing how He will work in my life here at Grace Fellowship.

[15:26] Thank you, Billy. Come, Michael, Rarick, and give us your testimony. Growing up in a Christian home, we attended church services regularly, and my parents both loved the Lord and sought to raise me according to the principles of the Bible.

From a young age, I was regularly exposed to sound preaching, seemingly a perfect situation for being saved at a young age, but that was not the case. Instead, I remained ignorant and rebellious to these things.

For the longest time, I was physically there, often passing the time thinking of anything but what was being preached. I knew the stories of the Bible and had a general understanding of Scripture, but it wasn't real to me and therefore it didn't seem urgent.

I'll do that later, I would tell myself. In my mind, I was a good person. After all, I wasn't in constant trouble like some of my peers. The Bible calls this folly.

As Isaiah 64, 6 says, All our righteous acts are like filthy rags. I was more focused on having fun, being independent, being happy, like a dog chasing its tail.

[16:44] I was chasing false and empty happiness. My conversion wasn't as drastic as Paul's was on the road to Damascus, but rather God chose to gradually open my eyes.

As a college student, I had made some new friends, but none would have a bigger impact than one. I would see make a drastic change from one semester to another. The work of the Holy Spirit in his life would have a profound effect on my life.

As we became friends, I saw the message I was taught at a young age lived out by this friend, and the Holy Spirit began to convict me of my sin and how I suppressed and rejected the urgency of the message of salvation.

I began to read my Bible regularly, paying more attention to the Word as it was being preached, and I prayed for salvation and forgiveness for my sins. It was a time in my life when I began to realize and see the ways God was blessing and providing for me.

One fall I became very ill and couldn't seem to get over it. I missed work and church, and I slowly regressed in my faith as I began to slack in my Bible reading and prayer.

[18:03] After finally regaining my health, I still found myself missing services and not spending as much time in the Word and prayer as I should have. The Holy Spirit intervened and convicted me of my backsliding.

And once again I sought forgiveness and repented for my weak faith. Philippians 1.6 Being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.

That verse is dear to me because the promise from God that he will never leave nor forsake me. After the last baptismal service, I began to seriously consider membership, but still had some doubts.

It was then when the Holy Spirit directed Pastor Aaron to talk to me, but I still had doubts. It was when, well, talk to me, and later Jason Webb approached me and we began to profit, a profitable Bible study.

Proverbs 16.9 says, In his heart a man plans his course, but the Lord determines his steps. Though the road may have its ups and downs, but at the end, the end of it all is my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ who willingly laid down his life for a sinner like me.

[19 : 27] There is no greater act of mercy than that. At a family conference many years ago, the speaker made the statement that the only thing that we bring to our salvation is the sin that requires it.

I still have many temptations and struggles to fight, but I have one who has been there before and will fight with me by my side.

I want to encourage those who have not repented to do so now. Don't wait until you're older. Don't make the mistake of thinking you need to make yourself acceptable.

As the hymn writer says, if you tarry until you're better, you will never come at all. Amen, brother. A reoccurring phrase in the book of Acts is, then those who believed were baptized.

A similar phrase such as that. Michael, you have testified that you too have come to believe on the Lord Jesus for your salvation. And so, tonight have come to be baptized.

[20 : 34] I want to ask you to make your baptismal affirmations before this congregation gathered in the name of Christ. Michael, do you confess that you are a hell-deserving sinner whose only hope of mercy is found in Jesus Christ and what He has done for sinners?

I do. Do you trust only in His blood and righteousness to save you and realize that the waters of baptism do nothing to wash away sin or to merit favor with God?

I do. I do. And do you desire tonight to publicly identify yourself as a disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ and purpose by His grace to turn from your sin and to follow Him in faith and obedience for the rest of your life?

I do. And on the basis of your profession of faith, I will baptize you tonight. Dennis, if you and Billy would come and you all are seeking membership in the church, and I'll ask you to make your membership affirmations to the church as well.

Dennis and Billy have both been baptized upon the profession of their faith before. We have studied together in Scripture the responsibilities of membership as outlined in our Constitution, and we have heard of your desire to fulfill those expectations of membership.

[22 : 07] We are simply asking you tonight to make that commitment public before the members of the church to whom you will be joined. And I'm going to ask that all the members of Grace Fellowship Church please stand in your seat.

Do you commit yourself by the help of God to order your life according to the standard of God's Word and to submit to the loving discipline of this church and the oversight of its elders?

Amen. Do you commit yourself to spread among us no teaching contrary to this church's confession of faith and to support the ministries of the church by your faithful attendance at its stated meetings?

I do. And will you commit yourself to find your place of service in this body of Christ in accordance with your own spiritual gifts and abilities and to cooperate in the outreach of this church in bringing the gospel to this needy world by your witness, your finances, and your prayers?

I do. Do you then commit yourself to this body of believers to love them and seek their good to work and live with them in harmony to encourage and watch over them in the Lord all to the end that Jesus Christ may receive glory in His church?

[23 : 36] I do. And members of Grace Fellowship Church do you welcome Michael and Dennis and Billy into the membership of this church and thereby commit yourselves to them as you have to one another to pray and labor for their building up and growth and grace and to esteem them in love as a brother and sister in Christ.

If so, say, we do. We do. Let's pray together. Lord Jesus Christ, Head of the Church, we bow in your presence with thanksgiving tonight.

We have heard the stories of sinners going their own way, their back turned to you and how you, the great seeking Savior, found them out with the gospel, convicted them of sin, opened their eyes, drew them to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

So we bless you for these testimonies of salvation. And we thank you, Lord, that you do not save us and then leave us to make our way to heaven alone, but that you put us in a band, in a company of travelers for our good, that we might travel to that celestial city together and so be encouragers to one another and helpers along the way.

Would you help us to be that to each other? We confess, Lord, our sin. And that we easily become stumbling stones to each other and offenses that would cause each other to stumble.

[25 : 15] Keep us from that and rather make us to truly do one another good, to come alongside each other, to set an example for one another, to pray for one another, move our hearts, Lord, and make us together as a body to reflect the grace of God, the love of our Savior that has found us out.

We do ask it for the glory and praise of your own holy name, Lord Jesus. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Michael, you testified clearly to us that it's the Lord who sought you and saved you, that you sat under the ministry of the gospel for many, many years, blind and dead in your sins, and how he's opened your eyes and how he is your confidence, your trust, and you trust in nothing but Jesus Christ to save you.

And on the basis of that profession of faith, I baptize you now, my brother, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. Buried in the likeness of his death, raised in the likeness of his resurrection.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Folks, if any of you have come to put your trust in the Lord Jesus Christ, we would be interested in talking with you about baptism.

Please see one of your elders. Please talk to your parents, children. This is to the glory of Jesus Christ when those he has saved stand up and say so.

[27 : 01] Let the redeemed of the Lord say so, those whom he has redeemed from the hands of the enemy. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Join your hearts together with me as we pray. Our Father, we thank you that you have given Christ to save sinners and to make them part of his own body, to make them part of the church, that you've given the Spirit to be poured out upon us, to help us on our way.

We thank you for these three that have been added to this body tonight, for Mike who has been baptized, and Dennis and Billy, and Mike all added to the membership of the church.

Would you unite us together? Make us a faithful body of Christ. Give us grace now to receive the teaching of your Word. Bless both the preaching and the hearing of it.

May it be unto your honor, your glory, your praise. In all the earth we pray, in Jesus' name. Amen.

You may be seated. Please take your Bibles and turn with me to 1 Corinthians 12.

[28 : 19] Paul's first epistle to the Corinthians and the 12th chapter. In this letter, Paul is writing to a fractured congregation at Corinth, divided over following certain human leaders, squabbling over who had the greatest gifts, whose spiritual gifts were better than another person's.

And one of the things that Paul does to seek to draw them back to a united church as they ought to be and as they once were, is to remind them of the things that they hold in common.

Yes, they were a diverse group of people. Yes, they had a significant diversity of gifts that was evident among them. but their diversity was not a reason for division, for them to be arguing with one another.

They can still enjoy great unity in the midst of diversity because of the things that they do have in common. And he points them to those things in this epistle of 1 Corinthians.

And the common ground that held the Corinthians together is the same thing that holds us together here at Grace Fellowship Church. And it's the same thing that binds us together with those Corinthian Christians. And Christians all over the world and throughout history.

[29 : 45] And that is that all have been made partakers of the one Holy Spirit. And so, all are members of the one body of Christ. We are members of the same body of Christ tonight that the Corinthian believers were members of to whom Paul was writing.

Listen to what Paul has to say. Listen to what our Lord has to say. In 1 Corinthians 12 to these divided Corinthians. We'll read verses 12-27.

The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts. And though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ. For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free, and we were all given the one Spirit to drink.

Now the body is not made up of one part, but of many. If the foot should say, because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body, it would not, for that reason, cease to be a part of the body.

And if the ear should say, because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body, it would not, for that reason, cease to be a part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be?

[30 : 59] But in fact, God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as He wanted them to be. If they were all one part, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, but one body.

The eye cannot say to the hand, I don't need you. And the head cannot say to the feet, I don't need you. On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable.

In the parts that we think are less honorable, we treat with special honor. In the parts that are unpresentable, we are treated with special modesty. Well, a presentable part needs no special treatment.

But God has combined the members of the body and has given greater honor to the parts that lacked it, so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other.

If one part suffers, every part suffers with it. If one part is honored, every part rejoices with it. Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.

[32 : 00] We want to briefly consider a few things tonight, really just from verses 12 and 13, relevant to what we've just seen in the baptism of Mike, in the addition of Mike and Dennis and Billy, to the membership of this local representation of the body of Christ.

And we want to see the illustration Paul uses. There's an illustration, but then we want to see the reality of it. The reality, the universal reality of the body of Christ. And then we want to see the reality of it for us right here, for Grace Fellowship Church.

So a universal reality and a local reality of this one illustration. And the illustration is a familiar one. It's the body. You have a body. It was crafted by the Creator who fashioned the earth.

Your body was knit together in your mother's womb. You're fearfully and wonderfully made. Your body is a remarkably complex assemblage of parts working together in perfect harmony.

Or it was designed to work in perfect harmony. Since the fall, it doesn't. And you all feel the effects of the fall in your bodies. But you know what it is to have a body made up of various members, various parts.

[33 : 13] There are organs and there are muscles and there are bones and there's skin and then those muscles and bones and skin combine to make fingers and hands and arms and legs and feet. And there's our head and our eyes and our nose and our mouth and our ears.

We're an assemblage of all these parts. And though there are many parts, there is just one body. There are the various systems of the body that work together.

The nervous system and the digestive system and the muscular system and the endocrine system and the immune system. All of these are working together as one body.

It's a remarkable thing that God has created that you're living in. We take it for granted because we've always had it. You don't even think about it. You go to raise your hand and you don't think about all the complex things that have to happen to be able to raise your hand or open the mouth to speak.

But God has designed a body with many parts that all work together. And you know that if one part isn't working so well, it affects all the other parts. You know that if you've ever had a head cold, that's just up in your head, but all of you feel miserable, tired, exhausted, unable to get out of bed.

[34 : 23] You know that if you've ever experienced pain in one particular location in your body, if you've ever broken a bone, that pain is sharp there, but the pain makes you nauseated.

It's connected because this part of your body is connected to the rest of your body and it all works together. So if one part is affected, all of the body is affected. You can't escape that.

And the individual parts aren't just that. They're put together into a body. It would be ridiculous if you had a bunch of fingers and feet and legs and heads laying around and they weren't put together in their body.

They wouldn't do any good. And so it is with the reality. The reality is the body of Christ. That's what Paul wants you to see. Yes, we have marvelous bodies and they work together amazingly well and they point to a glorious Creator. But Paul is pointing us to something else tonight and that is to the church.

[35 : 25] And we want to see that universal reality for a moment. You notice he says, the body is a unit in verse 12. It's made up of many parts. He really just says the body is one. No, it's made of many parts.

And it's parts of many. They form one body. So it is with Christ. What he means when he says Christ there. So it is with Christ. Christ is a body. He is the head of that body but it is made up of many members as well.

If you look around, you'll see some of the members of the body of Christ. They're right here tonight. That's what he's talking about. The church. The universal church. Believers from every tribe and tongue and people and nation and from history gone by and from the future yet to come.

All of these make up the universal church. The body of Christ. There's something that these Corinthians, something that we have in common. And that is that we are one in Christ.

And you notice he says, we were all baptized by one Spirit. Probably better to say all baptized in one Spirit. Into one body. One body of Christ.

[36 : 29] One church. And so, it was for the Corinthians and so it was for us. What do they have in common? Well, they were all, he says, we all were baptized in one Spirit.

All of us. Well, who's the all, Paul? Well, if you go back to the beginning of Corinthians, you find that he's writing to the church at Corinth, the church of God in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be holy.

All of you members of the church at Corinth, every one of you, not just the ones with the more noticeable spiritual gifts, but every one of you was baptized in the Holy Spirit.

And me too. We. Me, Paul, and all of you members of the church at Corinth, you all received the gift of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit was given to you to drink or was poured out on you.

It can be an agricultural term that's at the end of the verse there. You were irrigated with the Holy Spirit. He was poured out on you. You were baptized in the Holy Spirit. And notice that it's all.

[37 : 30] It's not just the really spiritual ones in Corinth that received the gift of the Spirit. No, it's all of you. Every person that comes to Christ receives the gift of the Spirit.

Receives the baptism of the Holy Spirit. It's not some second blessing that comes to really spiritual Christians. It's not something that comes later. No, it's the first first blessing.

And it is special, but it comes to all who put their hope and trust in Christ. It was for all the Corinthians. Not just the ones with great gifts. They had all of this in common.

And so they shouldn't be arguing amongst one another. In Acts chapter 2 when the crowd is cut to the quick at Peter's message and asked what they should do, Peter replied, Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

If you're a follower of Christ, you have the gift of the Holy Spirit. And that's what each Christian here tonight has. Mike, who was just baptized in the water, and all of you who have already been baptized, have been baptized in the Holy Spirit.

[38 : 38] You've received the gift of the Holy Spirit. He's dwelling in you even now. That is what one of the things is that binds us together in common.

If you're a follower of Christ, you've received this gift. And what we've done here tonight by receiving these into the membership of the church and baptizing Mike is simply to acknowledge that we believe that God has given them the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Who are we to exclude the ones that God has baptized in the Spirit? Many wonder whether this is talking about water baptism here or just the baptism in the Spirit.

I'm not prepared to resolve that debate tonight, but I think we can hardly think of baptism in water without thinking of baptism in the Spirit and the other way around. Because in Paul's mind and in his writing, we find that the two are very closely related.

The thing signified baptism in the Spirit and the symbol, the sign, baptism in water. Water baptism is a picture of baptism in the Spirit.

[39 : 41] And it's the baptism in the Spirit that engrafts us into the body of Christ. Not the sign. There's nothing effective that plunging someone under the water does.

That doesn't wash away their sin. It doesn't baptize them in the Spirit. It's a picture of what has already taken place. And so, when someone has received the gift of the Holy Spirit, they should be baptized according to our Lord's command.

Sinclair Ferguson says, Baptism with the Spirit inaugurates us into the life of union with Christ. Baptism with water marks this outwardly. So you see, Mike received the gift of the Holy Spirit. The baptism of the Holy Spirit. And tonight, he was baptized in water. There's a picture of that having received the Holy Spirit. And so it is. If you've been baptized, it's a symbol of a greater reality within that you've received the Holy Spirit.

And that is what binds us all together in the body of Christ. It doesn't matter who you were before. It doesn't matter if you were a Jew or a Greek, a slave or a free person. It doesn't matter if you're a teacher or a student.

[40:46] It doesn't matter if you're a millionaire or a minimum wage worker. It doesn't matter if you're a man or a woman, an adult or a child. Anyone can be a part of the body of Christ.

Every one of you here tonight can be part of the body of Christ. No one is excluded. If you're not a part of the body of Christ tonight, it's because you're excluding yourself.

Paul says it's open to anyone. Anyone can come and enter the waters of baptism if they've been baptized in the Holy Spirit. And so, while some groups and clubs and societies in our world might exclude some and include others on the basis of class or wealth or social status or gender or race or skill or intelligence or age, not so the church.

The church will receive all who come to her. All who come to Christ and have received the gift of the Spirit. That can be you tonight. And so, don't blame anyone but yourself tonight if you're not part of the church.

You're excluding yourself. All you have to do is come to Christ. You run to Christ. And you can stand up here. Maybe that scares you. God will give you grace.

[42:06] Don't let that be the thing that keeps you back. A fear of standing in front of people. You come to Christ and then you can stand here and profess with your mouth what Christ has done for you and enter the waters of baptism and be added to the local church.

If you don't, it's because you're rejecting it. Because you don't want it. It's open to all. And so, the church is much bigger than Grace Fellowship Church. We'd be pretty ignorant or arrogant tonight to think that we're the only ones who have ever received the gift of the Spirit, the baptism of the Spirit. No, the body of Christ extends throughout history into the future to all who put their hope in the Savior. Extending around the globe, we share in common with all of God's children the baptism in, the gift of, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

And so, here we are tonight. We have this in common. We have this binding us together with the Corinthians. But then, that universal church is divided into thousands of invisible, or visible local churches such as this one.

And so, there's a reality for us specifically here tonight. A reality for Grace Fellowship Church. We are part of one body. And we are part of this local body.

[43:22] When someone is baptized, signifying their inclusion in the body of Christ, the universal church, they should also be added to a local church. And that's what we've done here tonight.

God hasn't intended us for us to go throughout the world as lone ranger sorts of Christians all off on our own. No, He wants us to be part of the body of Christ. Part of a local assembly of saints.

And so, that's why we always put baptism and church membership together. Or why, if you ever have to leave this church and move somewhere else, why you should join yourself to another local church where you live.

As the Beiris have done tonight. Or if you have a change in conviction, they've been baptized previously, but they're joining themselves to a local body of believers. A local church.

There are many members. There's 101 members of Grace Fellowship Church now. And here are some of us tonight. Those who have been baptized into the Spirit, into the body.

[44:19] The question then for us is, are we functioning as a body of Christ? The point is that we are to be united. And I praise God for the unity that He evidenced in our business meeting yesterday.

That He's shown blessing to us by keeping us united. Over the years, I've just been here for four and a few months of those years. But God has been very good to us.

How can we continue to work together to enjoy the unity of the Spirit and the bond of peace? You notice that Paul calls it in Ephesians chapter 4, they're the unity of the Spirit and the bond of peace. That's because it's the Spirit that ties us all together. You know, we've all been baptized into one Spirit. So do you live like you're part of the body? Are you with the body when it gathers together? Can you imagine your body trying to get something done, but your foot refused to get out of bed with you this morning? Part of the body. Say, I'm not going to be part of the body today.

[45 : 20] It'd be hard to get around without your foot, wouldn't it? It's hard to get around without members of the body. You've been added to this body for a reason. We need your gifts. We need you to be here with us, worshiping.

Can you imagine that foot that decided to stay in bed surviving very long detached from the body? No. It wouldn't. It'd wither up and die without that source of life and blood.

So if you cut yourself off from the body, you're going to cut yourself off from that source of life. Are you doing your part? Each part has its place in the body.

Are you exercising the gifts that God has given to you for the good of the body? That's going to be something that's expected of you three new members. That you'll understand and seek to know what the gifts God has given you are.

And that you'll exercise them in the body of Christ. Even as we seek to exercise the gifts God has given us for your good. that's what's expected of a body. That it will minister to one another.

[46 : 23] If your foot gets a cut on it, do you just leave it? Let it get infected until you can hardly walk anymore? Or do you take your hands and use your eyeball and you put some antibiotic ointment on that cut and you put a bandage on it and you take care of it?

And so it is in the church. When someone's hurting, we don't just look at them and say, well, I hope they get better. No, we come alongside of them. We help them. We pick them up and set them back on the path.

We encourage those who are suffering. We encourage those who are downhearted. We help those who are in need. That's how a body functions. It doesn't ignore those of its members who are in need.

It comes alongside of them and helps them. And that is what in our membership commitments we've committed to do for you tonight and what you've committed to do for us. To come alongside and to help one another on the way to glory.

I hope we paid attention to our commitment of membership that we said we do tonight. That we will fulfill that for one another and for these new members that have been added to us.

[47 : 29] And we must be content in the gifts that God has given to us. Some gifts are more noticeable than others. And people who have gifts that aren't so noticeable can have a tendency to get a chip on their shoulder.

Yeah, I wish I had some gift that was more noticeable. God notices you. He sees your gift and this body couldn't function rightly without it. Whether it's ever noticed, whether it's ever praised by someone else or not.

And do you treat others as though they're fellow heirs of the Gospel of Jesus Christ? Brothers and sisters in Christ. Not younger siblings that you like to look down on and pretend like you're their parents.

but brothers and sisters in Christ. Sharing the same Spirit. Trusting in the same Savior. Maybe your gift is a little bit more noticeable.

Doesn't give you any right to look down your nose at the other people in the congregation.

Someone that maybe isn't your favorite person. It gives you no right to treat them poorly. You treat them as part of your own body.

[48 : 38] as someone you love and care for. Anything less will lead to division in the church like was the problem at Corinth. And so we must, by God's grace, be seeking to function as God intended as a body.

If one part is out of joy and it affects the rest, if one is living in sin, if one is living in unresolved conflict with another, if one is stirring up dissatisfaction and discontent and dissension, the whole body will suffer.

May God give us grace to function as He intended as a body working together. What a privilege. What a blessed people we are that ought to fill our hearts with thanks and praise to God tonight.

That He's given many people in this room tonight the gift of the Holy Spirit. Do you know that you couldn't survive in this world without the Holy Spirit? You wouldn't survive. You wouldn't be able to endure the temptations that are thrown at you every day. You wouldn't be able to walk in humility with the Holy Spirit. Do you see what a diverse group of people we are tonight?

[49:43] It's nothing short of the work of the Holy Spirit that keeps us all together. We are a strange bunch. And we're glad to add you all to us.

And you've broadened us. And you've made us a little bit stranger. Just by your uniqueness. I don't mean that derogatorily at all. But what else in the world would bind together this group of people? Accept the gift of the Holy Spirit. And so, what a blessing it is for us as Spirit-baptized believers. To welcome other Spirit-baptized believers by way of baptism, by way of acceptance into the membership of this church.

And now it is for us all together to proceed down this road of what a church should be. following our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Let our thanks be seen in our praise and worship to God.

Let it be seen in the way we conduct ourselves in the body of Christ. So, make no mistake tonight. The church is not this building that we're meeting in.

[50:51] It's you, the people filling the building. We're not planning a church expansion project. We're planning a church building expansion project.

And we pray that the Lord of the church will fill the building with more of His church. But don't confuse bricks and mortar, two-by-fours and sheetrock with living stones, with blood-bought sinners who have received the gift of the Holy Spirit and have been added to the body of Christ.

Don't confuse the two. The building is a place to meet. We're thankful for it. You are the church. We are the church. The body of Christ. Called by God to walk the road together.

And what a blessing. What a blessing to have brothers and sisters in Christ. To hold one another up. What a blessing that you need not walk through this world alone.

God's given us the Spirit. And He would give you the grace to walk this world alone, but He hasn't called you to do that. He's called us to walk together in assemblies. And here is one such assembly.

[52:07] One blessed assembly. God has been good to us and we pray for His continued blessing. Let's continue to do our part. To seek to promote that unity of the Spirit and the bond of peace.

That's the reality for Grace Fellowship Church. Finally tonight, is it a reality for you? Some here tonight are members of the church. Some here tonight are not.

And if you're not part of the body, you need to be. There is room here for you. If there's room in the body of Christ for somebody like me, there's room here for you.

You need the outpouring of the Spirit. You need to have faith in this glorious Savior who is the head of our church. The Lord Jesus Christ.

You need to run to Him tonight. And cast yourself on Him. And He won't say, you know what? I don't think you'll fit in very well in the body. He's going to send you away. Jesus has never sent someone away who came to Him seeking Him with a genuine heart.

[53:12] So come and seek Him. And you can have all of this. You can have Christ as your head. You can have the gift of the Spirit helping you to walk along the way.

You can have brothers and sisters in Christ holding you up. Sustaining you. Ministering to you. You come to Christ and you'll be added to His body.

Connected to Christians all over the world and throughout time. You then can come and confess Him in the waters of baptism and be added to the church. And yours could be the next baptismal service.

I pray that it's so. You come and join us tonight. Maybe there are some here tonight as well that believe they have put their hope and trust in Christ.

And Pastor John has already exhorted you to come and talk to us. It's the Lord's command that you be baptized. It's the pattern of the New Testament. It's the command that you join yourself to a body of Christ.

[54:08] And so don't keep going it alone. Come and be baptized and join the church. Join this happy band. Yes, we're a strange folk. But we're a happy folk. I love it here.

I love being part of the body of Christ. I love being part of this body of Christ. God has been very good to us. So, give thanks to Him tonight if you are part of the body and if you're not.

We are an undeserving people. We thank You that You have done that work for many here. We give You thanks and praise for what You have done and pray that You would continue to bless us. In Jesus' name, amen. Amen. may may may may may may may may may may may may may may may may may