

Worship Service

Palisades Mall, West Nyack, NY (Rockland County)

Sam Powell, Steve Kinnard, Steve Johnson, Phil Garrison

June 8, 2003; 10:00 a.m.

[OPENING SONGS]

[LORD'S SUPPER]

[CONTRIBUTION:]

PHIL GARRISON:

At this time we're going to take up our weekly contribution. Paul writes about this in 2 Cor. 9. He Says: "Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful Giver."

I really want to encourage us that as we give to God right now that we give in a way that God loves. That is, out of... cheerfulness. Let's pray. Father, thank you so much for this opportunity to give back to you. You have done so much for us. We are so grateful. In Jesus name, amen.

[SONGS]

SAM POWELL:

Good morning. It's good to see all of you. Let's bow for a word of prayer as we begin together.

Our God and Father in Heaven, indeed you are a great God. Father our prayer today is that we will live lives worthy of your son. That Father we would be the people that you sent Jesus to die for us to be. Father, help us to have the conviction and the courage to live out your word. Father to be willing to obey you when it's convenient and when it's inconvenient. Father, we trust you more than we trust our own wisdom. We trust you more than we trust men. Father, we realize that you are perfect and your will is perfect and as long as we surrender to you we have nothing to worry about. I pray you bless this service today. And Father, we pray that your spirit will be upon us and you will bring about radical change in our individual lives, that you will have a church that will give glory to your holy name. Bless this time that we have together. In Jesus name, amen.

My name is Sam Powell. I'm a Christian first, and I serve as one of the elders in the Church here. Dale Porter would be with you this morning but he's preaching the word in Long Island as they go through some transitions out there. But he is with us in spirit.

And I just want to start off by letting you know that I'm here in a spirit of love, a spirit of grace, a spirit of forgiveness, but also a spirit of righteous indignation. I just want you to know that as we get started.

My first question on this sheet of paper I have up here is: "Why am I here?" Well I want you to understand that from the beginning, that I'm here to do the job that God has ordained me to do, and that is to oversee and shepherd the cChurch of God that God has appointed me to serve. In Acts Ch 20, I want to read some Scripture to you as we get started, Paul tells the Ephesian elders, he says:

"Keep watch over yourselves, and over all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers."

That's what God has called me to do, to keep watch over the flock. You say, "Sam it's a big flock." Well, if we have righteous men and women who will fulfill their responsibilities in their respective ministries that they are in, we can do that job. We can't do it alone, but we can do it if we're putting Eph. 4 into practice. And we're equipping the saints to do the work of the ministry. In 1 Peter 5:1 Peter says, "To the elders among you I appeal as a fellow elder, a witness of Christ's sufferings and one who also will share in the glory to be revealed. Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers – not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be." Here again, God calls me to shepherd the flock with a willing heart and spirit. And I am willing to be here today.

1 Tim 5:17 Paul says:

"The elders who direct the affairs of the Church well, are worthy of double honor, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching."

I believe with all my heart that elders are to work together with the evangelists and with the teachers, with the deacons, to conduct the affairs of the Church, and I believe God holds me accountable for that. And therefore I have responsibility to fulfill the function that the Scriptures have outlined. And that's why I'm here today.

In Ephesians 4:11 Paul writes:

"It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service so that the body of Christ will be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of God."

Here again it's my job to help prepare God's people for acts of service. God wants his church to be built up. This should be a joyful, happy place this morning. When the leaders are doing their job, God's people are happy. They are filled with joy, they're filled with enthusiasm. When they're not, people are discouraged, they're disheartened. And they're not excited to serve and to be a part of the kingdom of God.

I've asked God to give me patience. Sure, I know what's been going on in the Church. None of us have been in a dark corner, we know what's going on. I've prayed, I've watched, and I've waited, hoping that in the respective ministries people could find themselves and maybe work through things. It's been 3 or 4 months. It hasn't happened.

And it's time to call the Church back to God and back to obedience to the word. Why am I here? I'm here to call you back to this book. Nobody should have a problem with that. The church should amen when we're called back to the word of God. There should be no reservations about that, none whatsoever, there should be nothing in your heart that's going "well I don't know about that." It's the word of God. This is what we're going to be judged by, this is what we live by.

I'm here to call us back to Jesus as Lord! When you stood in the waters of baptism, what was your good confession? What was it church? [*Church responds, "Jesus is Lord"*] Is Jesus still Lord? Is he lord of your time, lord of your actions, lord of your heart, lord of your mouth, lord of your relationships, lord of your money? Is Jesus Lord?? That's the commitment I made.

It doesn't matter what other people do. Jesus is Lord of my life. He determines what I do, not what men do. Not what anybody writes or says. I am committed to Jesus as Lord. There are places I don't go. There are things I don't say. And there are things I don't do, why? Jesus is Lord. We shouldn't have a problems with that. Jesus is lord.

I'm here to call us back to humility and submission to God and to one another. That's Biblical. "Submit to one another out of reverence for God [*Christ*]," Ephesians 5. I'm going to call us to repentance. Repentance for slander, gossip, rebellion, and pride. And there are few who are not guilty.

I'm here to call us back to the practice of forgiving one another from the heart, to living by grace, realizing how much we need it and so we should be able to give it to other. I'm here to call us back to unconditional love, where I love you regardless, where I'll bear with you regardless, because you're my brother in the Lord. I don't give up on you, and you don't give up on me.

I'm going to call us back to Biblical leadership. The Scriptures outline clearly how the Church is to conduct itself and to what the leadership is supposed to be all about. I'm going to call us back to biblical discipleship.

Now let me go ahead and make a couple of apologies here. I want to apologize to you and I mean it sincerely from the heart, for the chaos that has occurred in the ministry up here in Rockland.

It was a mistake to have open forums because they're not in the Bible and because it's a cowardly and damaging way to deal with conflict and with issues. The Scriptures outline how we ought to resolve things and it's never with a group of people standing up and telling one person what they did wrong to them. That's not in the Bible. And where do we mess up? When we take matters into our own hands and we try to use human wisdom to figure things out instead of God's wisdom. I'm sorry for that. I condoned it. I was a part of it. It was wrong. And we will never do it again.

It was a mistake and an error in judgment, and I ask your apology, to have transition teams or any leadership group that the evangelists and elders did not oversee. We had groups in this church that excluded the evangelists, and didn't want the elders to be involved. And every time it happened, it blew up in the members' faces, and in our face. We put men and evangelists in positions that are not supported by the Scriptures.

Now understand me – I believe in unity, I believe in consensus, but if God has called evangelists to appoint elders, those men can also work with godly men in their ministries, whom they choose, to help them move the Church forward. That is God's plan. That is God's will. And if we have a problem with that, the issue is trust in God and trust in his word. I'm going back to this book. That's the only guideline I have.

There should not have been voting in the Church. There's no scriptural precedent for voting in God's church. The Holy Spirit votes and makes things clear.

So, "Sam, do you want to go back to business as usual?"

We can't go back to business as usual – I'm not the same man I was 4 months ago. I'm not going back to business as usual. But we are going to have to move forward in a spirit of love and unity and righteousness, not business as usual. I pray God that as a result of this we'll be a better church, and more dependent on God, and take matters out of our hands and give it back over to the Lord who knows better than we do how things need to be done.

We got some smart people in the Kingdom. But human wisdom never works no matter how smart we think we are. We gotta do it God's way. There have been false accusations, suspicion, mistrust, and a lack of forgiveness in this ministry and throughout the Church. It's destroying the ministry. It must stop. It must stop. We gotta go back to living by the fruit of the Spirit.

You know what the real issue is in so much of what we're doing? The real issue is: do we trust God or not? Do we trust God? I think we've gotten too focused on men, and not enough focus on God.

I've been around a little while. Psalm 37:5:

"Commit your way to the lord, trust in him and he will do this: he will make your righteousness shine like the dawn, the justice of your cause like the noonday sun."

God says "Do you trust me? I will take care of things."

"Sam, does that mean we sit around and do nothing?" No. Say what you need to say, do what you need to do, in a spirit of humility and godliness. But after you do that, you have to leave it in God's hands. God said commit your way to me and I'll take care of it. He'll make it obvious.

In my 28 years as a disciple, I've never seen anybody get away with anything. And I go all the way back to Crossroads. Some of you never even heard of it. I was on the Crossroads staff, Cynthia and I both. If there's greed in the Church, God will expose it. If there's sexual sin, God will expose it. If there is deceit, and lying, harshness, and pride, God always exposes it.

Sometimes we think the changes that are being made are the result of what men have done. It's not -- it's the result of what God is doing. You gotta always remember that. I've never seen anybody who failed to repent get away with anything. Now because:

“Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account.” *[Hebrews 4:13]*

Do you trust God?

I'm not asking you to trust me. That's not the issue. I'd like for you to, but if I'm doing something wrong, trust that God will deal with me, and with whoever else. That's what we gotta get back to.

Ecclesiastes 12:14:

“For God will bring every deed into judgment including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil.”

Did you hear me church? God will expose everything.

I know some of us were thinking, “Well, Sam, I feel like...” I had a brother that told me, “Sam I feel like I've been duped. I feel like I've had the wool pulled over my eyes.” I said, “Well bro, a lot of people feel that. But the answer is not for you to give in to your anger and to go storming off and forming a faction within the Church, thinking that you can fix it. Just trust the word of God. Trust God. Pray. We can get together and talk. But you need to trust God.”

Not only must we trust God, but He tells us:

“Do not take revenge my friends, but leave room for his wrath. I will avenge, I will repay, says the Lord.” *[Romans 12:19]*

We don't need to do God's job for him. I have a hard enough time doing my job! I don't need to try to do God's job. I want to know where is the fear of God? Where is the fear of God?

I respect the leadership of the Church, you know why, because God commands me to. And I do it because I fear God. And there are things we should not do because we have a reverence for God.

“The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.” Proverbs 9: 10.

I just want to let you know. I'm embarrassed. I'm ashamed. And I'm appalled at how we've conducted ourselves at a time of crisis. Cynthia and I challenge our children to have better attitudes than I've seen in some of our adults. The gossip, the slander, the unwholesome talk, the anger, the mistrust, the lack of forgiveness, people saying they will not talk to people, who will not get with people, who will not try to resolve issues.

If you will not forgive your brother, God will not forgive you. If you can't love your brother whom you do see, you can't love God who you can't see. The e-mails, the use of the internet to

put things out there that are half truth, that hurt people, to spread them all over the land without first talking to the person that you have the issue with, is cowardly and ungodly and wrong. It is wrong.

That's not the way Christians resolve things. That's not what the Scriptures teach, brothers and sisters. I'm calling people in my ministry, in my personal ministry, to get back off the internet and to get into their Bibles, because there's so much pollution out there. And it's just one side of the story.

I want to challenge you in Rockland -- you should be an example to the rest of the Church. Some of our most mature, seasoned disciples are right here in this ministry. You should have been setting an example of perseverance and how to keep your heads in times of difficulty and trial. A lot of you haven't done so, and it's to your shame. We're to be the stronger ones in the Lord -- we're older in the Lord. This should be a fountain from which we can draw future eldership, future deacons. But in times of testing a lot of us have failed.

And we've been more concerned about getting our feelings out, and having people hear what we say, than we have about the unity of the Church and holding together the fellowship, and not thinking about the children and the young Christians in the Church that we should be shepherding and protecting from this kind of nonsense! That's where our hearts should have been.

There needs to be repentance. There needs to be repentance that is evident by our deeds. That's what I'm calling you to. The Bible says there's a time for everything. And I think there was time for this Church to be shaken up. It was good for us. There was a time for me and the rest of the leaders to re-examine ourselves and to apologize and ask for forgiveness, and to want more people in our lives and to lay a stronger and a larger base for leadership. There's a time, and I'm thanking God for it. I thank God that I'm asking a lot of people a lot more questions before I move forward on anything. That's good.

But brothers, sisters, I believe this is also, and I think the time has come, for us to move forward, not to business as usual but with faith in God, trust in God, and love for one another. We gotta move forward, and not let Satan rule and reign in our fellowship! What do you think is going on? Satan is trying to destroy the Church of God! It's no joke! That's what's going on here! The battle is not with flesh and blood! Your brother is not the issue. The devil of hell wants to destroy the New York Church of Christ. He said, "20 years is enough."

That's when we started, 20 years ago. 18 souls. God blessed it. Through all our bumbling and stumbling and mistakes, and we made many of 'em, even our sin, but God blessed it. And after 20 years, Satan has said "Enough. I want to destroy this church, and the entire movement of God." He's done a heckuva job doing it. He's done great.

But the Bible says, if we resist him, he will flee from us. It's time to start resisting him. It's time to take a stand. It's time to tell your brothers to stop sending you emails, and if they have something to say about somebody to say it to them, not to you. It's time to take a stand.

It's time to forgive. You say "Well I don't think the brother's repented and done all he should have done." Well what about you??? Is that the measure we want to use? Let's be careful here.

It's time to surrender to God's will.

“Not my will but God's be done.” [cf. *Luke 22:42*]

It's not what a discipler does. “If anyone comes after me, he must...” Do what? “Deny himself!” [cf. *Matthew 16:24*] It's not what you want. It's not about your way. What does Jesus want? What does God want?

It's time to have Biblical leadership in our church. Let me say this. I'm calling the evangelists of this ministry -- Steve Kinnard, Phil Garrison, Steve Johnson -- I'm calling you before God and before your brothers and sisters to fulfill your God-given roles. Amen? That is to, “Preach the word in season & out of season, to correct, to rebuke, to instruct, yes, with great patience and careful instruction.” [2 *Timothy 4:2*] But you gotta preach the Word. You gotta step forward and lead God's people! Yes -- you listen, you try to help, you gotta call people back to this book, and call them to be true disciples of Jesus Christ and do not apologize for it because it's right! It is right, people! If we try to do it any other way, it won't work.

I'm calling the Church because it's time to have Christian relationships. I'm calling you as an individual disciple to submit to God and to submit to Godly leadership. See, submission is not something you do because you feel like it. Submission is something you do because you trust God's will.

I'm also calling you to stop being so critical. Everywhere I go and preach, people are analyzing and writing down and trying to pick everything apart. That's not the Spirit of God. I'm your brother! I love you, you're supposed to love me. What is going on here?! I've shared some things, I made some mistakes, and -- you know what -- I'll make some more in the future. And so will you!

We can talk about it, get with one another, but then we're going to move forward! We're family. I don't know what your family's like, but in my family, there's conflict. It starts with me and the wife. That's right. In my family, the kids don't always want to do what I want them to do. But you know what, we work it out -- we just don't stop being family, we work it out. We're supposed to be the family of God.

I'm calling you back to that. It's time once again to start seeking and saving the lost. When's the last time you had a Bible study with somebody? When's the last time you tried to help someone get somebody to go with you? We're so focused on our own problems.

It's time once again to be the Church that glorifies God. I'm going to say it straight up as clearly as I know how. I say this with complete humility, but I say it with all my heart. This is not the Church for you if you are not willing to surrender to God, have the Bible as your standard, and allow the evangelists who I have mentioned to lead you in the way God commands them to.

I don't know why anybody would want to be part of a church where they distrust the evangelists and the elders, and undermine what they do. Why would you want to come? Why would you want to be here? You're free to go and do whatever you think you have to, but as long as you're a part of this Church, you're going to be called first of all to submit to God and then to the leadership that God has put in place.

Jesus is Lord. It's his church. And He's given me responsibility in it. And I'm going to fulfill it. And I pray God you have the same conviction.

I sat down with Steve Kinnard this week. I sat down with Steve Johnson, I talked with Phil Garrison. These are not perfect men. But I believe in them. They have my support. And I believe God wants you to follow them, I believe they will lead you and your family. You say they got this weakness and that weakness – who doesn't?? But I guarantee you that if we make a decision today to do it God's way, God will bless it, and we'll see great victory.

There might be a little bit more I want to say later but right now, I'm going to call one of your evangelists, brother Kinnard, and, Steve, I want you to preach the word of God.

[Much hollering and Marine barks.]

STEVE KINNARD:

Sam I appreciate so much your being here today and calling us all to repentance. It is time. I'm thankful for the elders of this Church. I'm thankful that they really helped us to come to this decision this time, for us to repent, for us to see the direction that we need to go and for us to go in that direction.

I'm just going to, I'm going to preach from the Scriptures today and then I'm going to preach my convictions.

The elders of the NYCOC have asked me to preach a sermon, a sermon today that really calls this Church back to the lordship of Jesus, to the standard of the Bible, and to simply doing things Jesus' way, the 1st century way.

Over the years, we have made many, many mistakes. Over the years I have many mistakes. I have apologized for the mistakes that I've seen. I'm sure that God will show me more areas which I need to continue to change. Some have chosen to forgive, others have not. That's really up to you. What I have to do is look at my life and see, these are the things that I'm done, these are the things that I'm sorry for, pray for me, God help me change. Forgiveness is up to you.

The sermon today really is: will Jesus be the Lord of this Church? Will Jesus be the Lord of your life? The answer to the first one I know -- Jesus will be the Lord of this Church. To be part of this Church, Jesus must be the Lord of our lives.

I've gotten calls this week, asking me, "Steve, this Sunday are you going to divide this Church?" Well guys, the fact is this Church is already divided. We have divisions; we have factions; we have dissensions; we have discord. We just need to recognize this and do something about it.

What does the Bible say about division in the Church? Some of us want to submit to the elders and are willing to do that -- other of us aren't. Some of us want the evangelists to lead; others of us don't. Some of us believe in the Gospel plan of salvation and that's what we want to follow; others don't. Some of us believe in the One Church, like I talked about in the Scriptures of Ephesians 4; others do not. Some of us believe that we should say no to slander and gossip and

complaining and arguing; some of us take part in these activities on a daily basis. Some say, "Well, we need more disclosure." Others say, "No, it's time to move on." There's a division. There's a division in the Church.

The elders have decided we just need to call the Church back to Jesus being Lord. Not only that, many, many members in this Church have made the same pleas. You've stopped by my house. You've called me. You've said "Steve, it's time for us to have Church again. Steve, it's time for us – Amen! -- Steve it's time for us just to come together and just worship God on Sundays. It's time for us just to get together at midweeks and just study the word of God together. It's time. It's time. We want to follow the leadership; we have forgiven them; we're ready to move on." I've heard so many of you say this. So now it's time.

But we must deal with the division. There is division here; it does exist.

Jesus himself said a house divided against itself will not stand. [*cf. Matthew 12:25*] That's the word of Jesus. We've got to recognize we are a house divided against itself. We have to call out the division. We're going to be unified.

Paul makes it clear in Ephesians 5, when he talks about the sins of the sinful nature, that dissension, discord, and faction -- they're all sin. And it's interesting that of all the sins there 3 of them deal with divisions. Because it's so much a part of our human nature, of our character. Be critical, backbiting, the slander, to gossip, to have discord, dissension and faction. But it's not right. It's not right, and we have to call it sin. And we have to deal with it.

It's time to purify our hearts. It's time to purify the Church and get rid of any dissension, discord and faction that exists.

Look over in 1 Corinthians 1. This Church isn't a perfect church, but you know what? That makes us like the Church in the Bible because they weren't perfect either. You look at the Church in Corinth, it was a church in which there were many things going on there that just weren't right. But Paul wrote to the Church as an apostle, as a teacher as a evangelist, and said these things need to change. When you look at the beginning of it, one of the things he talks about, division. Division, it must change.

Verse 10:

"I appeal to you brothers in the name of our lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another so there may be no division among you so that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought. Brothers, some from Chloe's household have informed me that there are quarrels among you. What I mean is this: one says, 'I follow Paul,' another, 'I follow Apollos,' another, 'I follow Cephas,' still another, 'I follow Christ.' Is Christ divided? Is Paul crucified for you? Were you baptized into the name of Paul? I am thankful that I didn't baptize any of you except Crispus and Gaias so that no one can say that you were baptized into my name. Yes I also baptized the household of Stephanus. Beyond that I do not remember if I baptized anyone else. For Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel, not with words of human wisdom lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power."

As Paul writes to the Church in Corinth, he looks at a quarrelling Church. He looks at a church that has discord and factions, a church that is truly divided, and he says to them, "Let there be no division among you." That's the standard -- "No division." We must be perfectly united in mind and thought.

Today that's where we want to get to, we want to get to the place where there aren't any divisions, we're perfectly united in mind and thought.

These divisions go beyond just personality conflicts. They go to doctrinal matters. Will we submit to our elders or not? Will we believe in the Gospel plan of salvation and the One Church as taught in the Bible or not? Will we stop dissension, discord, and factions or not? These are matters of following the Scriptures.

20 years ago, Steve and Lisa Johnson brought a team of 18 disciples to New York to begin the Church here. Twenty years, later this group has over 5000 disciples in it. This is the group that helped you find salvation. This is the group that helped many of you keep you marriages together. It is the group the helped many of you overcome chemical dependency and addiction in your life.

We've made mistakes over the years. I've made mistakes over the years. And we've admitted it, and we've asked your forgiveness. You know what? We'll make more mistakes. I'll make mistakes this week, because I'm human. But let's not forget the great good that's been done by this Church.

If, after this sermon, we only have again a team of 18 disciples that are like-minded and unified and want to follow the Scriptures together, then Amen! That'll be a great improvement over the lukewarmness and the deadness and the backbiting and the slander and the gossiping and the discord and the division that's in what we call the Church right now. We need to make Jesus our Lord.

I have three points I want to make concerning this choice about division in the Church.

The first point is that, if Jesus is Lord, then we will submit to the authority of the elders of this Church, and to the leadership of the evangelists and the teachers that serve that eldership. Sam's already gone through many of the Scriptures. I won't mention them again, but I will mention that Ephesians 5:23 says that Jesus is the head of the Church. We follow Jesus, He is the authority. We follow His Word as our standard.

But Jesus has also established in His Church that there is leadership and that we need to follow the leadership that God has put in place. In Ephesians 4:11, Sam mentioned it says, "It was He..." Who is that? Was it Paul? No Jesus, God. "It was He who gave some..." Not everyone. Not a democracy. Not an equal vote amongst all. "It was He who gave some..." to lead the Church in this capacity, "to be apostles to be prophets, some to be evangelists, some to be pastors, elders, some to be teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service so that the body of Christ may be built up. God did the choosing. God still does the choosing. He picks out of the many some who are to lead the many. We've got a decision, if we are willing to submit or not.

In Titus 1:5, Titus was told that he was to appoint elders. And then as he, as this evangelist appointed elders then they were to oversee the work of the Church. To oversee means they are to direct the affairs of the Church. 1 Tim 5:17. Sam read in Acts 20 about the Church in Ephesus and the role of the elders there, and you can go back to look at Acts 20:28-31 and see that the shepherd, the elder, is to oversee the Church, he is to watch over the flock. He is the shepherd, he is to lead. We just have a decision, are we going to believe the Bible and follow it or not?

Some people have said they will not submit to the direction and authority of the elders of the NY church. Others have wanted us to declare ourselves autonomous of the New York Church of Christ, so that we will no longer have to follow the eldership of the Church, of the New York Church of Christ. Some men on the transition team held these views. Therefore I could not be unified with these men.

I believe that we need to follow the elders of this church. I believe that's the Biblical view, and that's what God wants us to do. Jesus gave some to be elders over this church and some evangelists and some teachers. And we must submit to their leadership.

I personally will submit to the leadership of the elders of this church. I will work under their leadership. I will not lead us into an autonomous congregation. If that's what the elders deem that they want to happen, then amen, I will follow their lead. But they have not asked us to do that. That has not been their wishes. And I will submit to their leadership. This is a matter to me of Biblical, doctrinal authority.

Some will say this is a step back to the old days and the old ways. But I say it's a step back to the Bible days and the Bible ways. We must obey God not these men. I trust our elders. I want to submit to the eldership that God has put in place over this church.

Some will say this is just another example of systemic evil. I say no. It's an example of Biblical pattern. And we need to follow the pattern of the Bible.

I trust our elders. They're working in consensus with other men. They've admitted their mistakes and want to move on and do great things for God.

I want to work in consensus with other men, but men with whom I am truly united, that we're going to begin at least with the starting point that we will submit to the elders of this church. Jesus must be our Lord in this area.

Second point: if Jesus is Lord, he will be the Lord of our tongues. We've allowed backbiting, slander, gossip, complaining, and arguing to overturn the Church. There are people who keep wanting more financial disclosure as a guise to divide the Church, saying they want transparency, have just been biting and devouring until we've almost destroyed the Church. There is a definite division here. We've got to call this as it is, and then follow the Bible standard: "Let there be no division in the Church." We've got to be perfectly united in mind and in thought.

Listen to these warnings in the Scripture. Romans 6 :17:

“Watch out for those who cause division or put obstacles in your way. They are contrary to the teaching you have learned. Keep away from them.”

It’s just the Bible. That’s what it says.

Titus 3:10-11:

“Warn a divisive person once, then warn him a second time. After that have nothing to do with him. You may be sure that such a man is wayward and sinful, he is self-condemned.”

Heb 12:15:

“See to it that no one misses the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many.”

Ephesians 4:29:

“Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs that it may benefit those who listen.”

Philippians 2: 14

“Do everything without complaining and arguing.”

We need to see that we have allowed complaining, arguing, slander, gossip, to just take over. We have these clear warnings here about not to do that.

There are also warnings about engaging in this activity, listening to this activity, passing things on to others. We need to just spend more time in our Bibles than on the Internet. And we need to be careful. Titus 3:9 says:

“Avoid foolish controversies, genealogies and arguments and quarrels about the law because they are unprofitable and useless.”

Philippians 4:8 says:

“Brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable – if anything is excellent or praiseworthy, think about such things.”

Proverbs 26 --Matt Fridley showed me this Scripture here:

“The words of a gossip are like choice morsels. They go down to a man’s inmost parts. Like a coating of glaze over earthenware are fervent lips with an evil heart.”

I stopped reading some of your e-mail, because -- quite frankly -- it’s just foolish controversy, arguments, and quarrels. It’s not excellent and praiseworthy. Matthew 18 is still in the Bible and we need to practice Matthew 18 discipleship.

We have a choice today. Will Jesus be the lord of our tongue or not? Will we stop biting and devouring? Will we stop arguing and complaining? Will we start encouraging and lifting up each other. I know this is what so many of the disciples here want. They want to come to church on Sunday and just worship God together. So many want midweeks where we're simply just fed the Scriptures. We want to learn from the Bible. We want Sunday services that are just full of worship to God. They want fellowship in which we really have deep relationships and we are united, perfectly united in mind and thought, and get on with God's Word. To do that, we've got to stop biting and devouring each other. Just got some decisions to make.

If Jesus is Lord, we'll make the Bible our standard and we'll believe in the One Church and in the Gospel plan of salvation as presented in the Bible. Some of us we've gotten weak on doctrine over the last few months. The Bible does teach there is one church, and if we are going to please God we need to be part of that one church. Ephesians 4:4:

“There is one body, which is the Church, and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called, one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all.”

The New Testament teaches that when a person becomes a disciple God adds them to His Church, to the One Church as presented in the Scriptures. Romans 16:16 even identifies that as the Church of Christ: “The Churches of Christ salute you.” To be a part of this Church, then, we must teach what the Bible teaches and obey what the Bible says, even when it comes to how to become a Christian. We must hear the message. Romans 10:14. We must believe that Jesus is Lord. Mark 16:15-16. We must repent of our sins. Luke 13:3-5. We must confess Jesus as Lord. Rom 10: 9-10. We must be baptized. Acts 2: 38, Romans 6. This is God's plan of salvation. We must follow what the Bible says, and we must teach it to other people so that they can be part of God's Church.

“Well what about all the thousands of people who pray Jesus into their heart, accepted him as their personal savior and then were baptized because the Bible teaches obedience there? What about all of those people?” Well, they didn't obey God's plan. It was Charlie Finley's plan in the early 1900's, but it's not God's plan.

“Well what about all those who were sprinkled when they were children? What about all those thousands of people that did that?” It's not God's plan. It was Augustine's plan in 325, but it's not God's plan.

“I want to go worship at an evangelical, non-denominational church around the corner.” Well you can go, but you're worshiping in false doctrine. Not God's plan.

People have asked me, “Well, what about the studies? When are we going to improve the studies? When are we going to make changes in the studies?” You know what? I could take the studies like we've been doing them for the last 20 years, sit down and study the Bible with someone and they could become a disciple at the end of those studies. We need to tweak a few things here and there. But I can study the Bible, go study with people, and they can become Christians.

The problem right now is not what are we going to do about the studies, it's we're not studying the Bible with anybody. That's the problem. Get out and study the Bible with people and maybe we'll start tweaking them. It's like we've taken the great commission and we've ripped it out of the Bible. And I know why, the Bible is clear. Stop biting and devouring one another or else you will be destroyed. We've been spending too much time arguing, biting, and devouring. We've lost our focus for the lost. There are people all around us that would love to know the truth and we've stopped sharing it. We've got to get back to obeying the great commission.

We will not go back, as Sam said, we will not go back to the way things were before. We can't do that. But we also need to remember that many of the things we were doing they were Biblical and right. Many, many, many people want to move on. And we're going to move on. We're going to be unified, perfectly united in mind and thought. We'll meet on Wednesday, the men and women will meet together, and we'll have a Bible study together. Then we'll meet here on Sunday, we'll have a Father's Day service, and we'll worship God together. If you want to be a part of that, of moving on, of doing the things we've talked about, submitting to the eldership, submitting to the leadership, taming our tongues, seeing what the Bible says about salvation and about the one church, then we can move on together.

But I want this to be a church that isn't afraid to use the word evangelism. It's a Biblical word -- it's even there in Greek. Studies with someone is a positive thing, a church where that's a positive thing. A church where dissension and factions and discord are looked upon as sin. A church where Matthew 18 is obeyed and practiced. A church where the authority of the elders and the leadership is respected. A church where we can look forward to coming to church to on Sunday to worship God together. A church where [at] midweek we can take time to have public reading of Scripture, and prayer and teaching and great fellowship together. A church where we avoid foolish controversies that are unprofitable and useless. A church where we can build a loving community that is grounded in the word of God. Amen!

SAM POWELL

I want to thank Steve for what he said, and I want to thank him for the way he said it. When we're trying to deal with cancer, the worst thing we could do is to deal with some of it, but not all of it. We need to have a radical change in the Church.

I'm going to call all the evangelists to speak to you today. I'm going to call brother Steve Johnson to come up here. I believe in Steve.

STEVE JOHNSON

One thing that I would appreciate for everybody to do today, is if you hear any rumors that I have resigned or quit from the ministry, the person is either misinformed or not telling you the whole truth. Unless through some act of God it becomes clear to me at some point in my life that I should not preach the gospel, I have no choice but to preach the gospel. I didn't go into the ministry because I wanted to. I went into the ministry because I felt responsible to over 28 years ago. For over 26 years I have been employed as an evangelist.

Today I just simply wanted to share with you that I have no intention of ever resigning or of ever quitting from the ministry. At this moment in time I have no intention of moving from Rockland. My intention is to stay here as an evangelist and try to do the best I can to support the other evangelists and the elders of this church and the brothers who have asked me to, for us to be a church belonging to God and returning to the idea of restoring New Testament Christianity, returning to the idea of going and making disciples and baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit and teaching others to do the same thing, so on and so on and so on.

But while I want you to understand that if it's God's will I will never resign from the ministry, as of last week I stopped being paid to be in the ministry. I received my last check from the New York City Church of Christ right before May 31. People will say, "Well, whose decision was that? Were you forced to? Did anyone ask you to?" The elders asked me not to, but ultimately agreed with my desire. It was my own decision, and I immediately ceasing receiving payment from the Church. I began working with a brother who started a business, and my intention is in the language of Paul to support myself to make tents, but to continue to preach the gospel.

In 1 Corinthians 9:1, and for the sake of time I won't read all of these verses, but Paul goes into a defense of the right of apostles and evangelists, elders and those in the ministry being supported in the ministry. He even uses words that many of my brethren are not comfortable with. He uses the word "material harvest." And for so many of us that's a struggle and a problem.

For over 26 years I can simply say what Paul said towards the end of the Scriptures I would have liked to read to you, he says in verse 16:

"When I preach the Gospel, I cannot boast, for I am compelled to preach. Woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel. If I preach voluntarily, I have a reward; if not voluntarily I am simply discharging the trust committed to me."

And the language of Paul, when he says, "if not voluntarily," he means, "if not free of pay." For years I have not been free of pay; I have simply discharged the duties that I was entrusted with. I have simply done what the Church paid me to do out of my obligation to Christ and to God. But beginning last week, with all that's in me I want to join Paul in being able to say the next verse:

"What then is my reward? Just this, that in preaching the gospel I may offer it free of charge and so not make use of my rights in preaching it."

I've enjoyed those rights for years. From this point on I'll no longer enjoy those rights. I'd like your prayers. I've never done this before in adult life, but I trust God.

A lot of us may not be going to church together any more. Some of us, it may take a little while to realize that and admit it and accept it. For those who find themselves completely agreeing with the things that have been shared today, in the coming days will find themselves being part of the New York City Church. Those who are not totally comfortable with the things that have been shared today will find yourselves not being part of the New York City Church.

Rockland County only has 287,000 in population. A number of you are from Orange County. It's like we live in a small town spread out over a larger area. We're going to bump into each other.

I'd encourage all of us to be nice to each other, and maybe someday some of this stuff can be worked out. Maybe not. Maybe some of you want to go and start your own congregation. God bless you and good luck.

But we're not going to go on being part of this congregation in the atmosphere that there's been. And -- so help me God -- I'm not moving. I'm not going anywhere. I stand completely behind the elders and the other evangelists, and we're going to stay here and we're going to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ and continue on this path. God bless you all.

PHIL GARRISON

I don't know about you, but I am deeply convicted by today. You know why I'm deeply convicted? Because everything that was said is right. I'm convicted personally just as a Christian. I'm convicted in my leadership. But I'm convicted, I'm challenged, I'm cut, because what came out of Sam's mouth and what came out of Steve's mouth was right. It's right. It was from the Bible. It could have come out of your mouth, it could have come out of my mouth, could've come out of his mouth or her mouth. The mouth doesn't matter. What matters is what was taught was right. It was from the Bible and it is true.

I'm getting up here to say I'm in complete agreement with what was taught. But you know it doesn't really matter whether I'm in complete agreement or not because it's right. I could agree or I could not agree. It doesn't matter. It still doesn't change the fact that it is right. What was taught today is from the Bible and we've got to follow that.

If you have a hard time with what was taught today, please do yourself a favor and go work it out with God. Please don't take it out on the group of people here who want to do what's right. Don't take it out on the leadership that wants to lead the group of people to do what is right. Please go wrestle with it with God, and work it out there.

I love you. I'll be there on Wednesday night.

SAM POWELL

I do want to make it very, very clear. This Wednesday night, at the Clarkstown Reformed Church, we're going to have midweek, at 7:30.

The only people who need to be there are the people who decided to make Jesus Lord, the Bible their standard, and who are ready to follow Steve Kinnard, Steve Johnson and Phil Garrison as their evangelists. That's it.

If you are not there, we can't have people coming wanting to divide things, wanting to continue to talk about issues. We're moving forward. Do we love you? Do we still want to pray for you? Do we still want to ask God to continue to make things clearer to us that maybe we're not seeing? Sure we do. But we're not going to sit around and let Satan destroy the Church. We're not going to sit around and let the world go to hell while we're trying to decide what we're going to do. We're not going to do that.

We're called by the Scriptures to be the Church of God even in the midst of trial. We have an obligation to God and to the lost world around us and to one another. We will meet together. There will be a spirit of love. There will be a spirit of humility. There will be spirit of unity. But there will be a spirit of intolerance to gossip, and backbiting, and bitterness and division. It will not be tolerated at all. That is Biblical, that is right.

We're going to be the Church of Jesus Christ. I hope to see you Wednesday night, 'cause we will have a party to the glory of Jesus Christ. We're being to be free, free at last, free at last, thank God Almighty, we're going to be free at last, free to serve God, free to serve one another, free to be the kind of disciples that we read about in God's word. I hope to see you Wednesday night and God Bless you.

Let's stand together, we're going to close out with a song.

Transcription by Ken Carlstedt, edited by Catherine Hampton.