

# The Rise of the Christians

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] Let me pray for the reading and preaching of God's Word. Dear Father, we thank you for calling us into your family, rescuing us from sin and death, giving us eternal life, this joyful fellowship we share with you and with one another, your people.

We humble ourselves once again before your Word. We have come to worship you.

We pray for you. To pledge our allegiance once again to you and to your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. We want to hear from you in the reading and preaching of God's Word that we might know how, as one church, we might build up one another.

We pray for conviction that you lay on each and every member's heart a specific way you are calling him or her to build up this body and use their gifts.

And we pray that you'd impress deeply upon us our sense of dependence on you and our interdependence with each other as members of the body of Christ.

[ 2 : 0 1 ] Speak to us. We are listening to you. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Acts chapter 11, verses 19 to 30.

Now those who were scattered because of the persecution that arose over Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch, speaking the word to no one except Jews.

But there were some of them, men of Cyprus and Cyrene, who on coming to Antioch spoke to the Hellenists also, preaching the Lord Jesus.

And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number who believed turned to the Lord. The report of this came to the ears of the church in Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch.

When he came and saw the grace of God, he was glad, and he exhorted them all to remain faithful to the Lord with steadfast purpose. For he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith.

[ 3 : 1 0 ] And a great many people were added to the Lord. So Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul, and when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch.

For a whole year, they met with the church and taught a great many people. And in Antioch, the disciples were first called Christians. Now in these days, prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch, and one of them named Agabus stood up and foretold by the Spirit that there would be a great famine over all the world.

This took place in the days of Claudius. So the disciples determined everyone according to his ability to send relief to the brothers living in Judea. And they did so, sending it to the elders by the hand of Barnabas and Saul.

This is God's holy and authoritative word. When I was a student at the Sovereign Grace Pastors College, there was a class on church planting, and we were learning about how best, some of the best practices for planting a church, starting a new church in an area where there's no church.

And we had several instructors, and one of them was someone who leads a denomination and that has been, by all appearances, very successful in planting churches. And he said something that was surprising and has stuck with me.

[ 4 : 33 ] He said, quote, it's easy to plant a church service, but it's hard to plant a church. What he meant by that was this, that it's easy to find a gifted speaker or someone with a charismatic personality, team them up with a team of gifted musicians and graphic artists, and put together an impressive service.

And when you do that, when you have an attractive product, an appealing product, it's not hard to get consumers. People come. It's not hard to get a crowd. But if you want more than consumers, if you want a congregation of people who have deep relationships with one another, if you want people who love and serve one another, in other words, if you want to plant a church, not just a church service, that takes the hand of God.

That's why it says in verse 21 that the hand of the Lord was with them. That's why it says in chapter 11, verse 23, that the grace of God was evident among the Christians there in Antioch.

It takes, on top of that, all the various members of the body of Christ pitching in and using their gifts to build up the church. That's what the church is meant to be. And that's what we see here in Acts 11, verses 19 to 30.

Some of you might have wondered at times, you know, what can I possibly do to serve Christ and His church? There are so many other gifted people, so many other mature people.

[ 6 : 13 ] What can I possibly do for this church? Well, if you are a member of this body of Christ, then you do have a role to play. God has given you, in particular, gifts that this specific body needs.

In this passage, we see believers serving in many different ways. We see evangelists speak. We see apostles established. We see shepherds exhort.

We see teachers teach. We see prophets prophesy. And we see disciples give. And the main point of all of this is that Luke is trying to convey to us is that the church grows as its interdependent members partner and serve together in the grace of God.

The church grows as its interdependent members partner and serve together in the grace of God. First, we see the evangelists speak in verses 19 to 21.

We already saw in chapter 8 how believers were scattered by the persecution that broke out against the church after martyrdom of Stephen had the effect of actually spreading the gospel abroad, pushing the believers out of Jerusalem and Judea to Samaria, where the Samaritans, kind of a half-Jews, were living.

[ 7 : 29 ] The great scattering of the church by persecution led to the great spread of the gospel by those very same believers. And we see the same phenomenon happening here in verses 19 to 20.

It says, Now those who were scattered because of the persecution that arose over Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch, speaking the word to no one except Jews.

But there were some of them, men of Cyprus and Cyrene, who on coming to Antioch spoke to the Hellenists also, preaching the Lord Jesus. The word Hellenists is the same word that we saw in chapter 6 where the Hellenized Gratian Jews were in conflict with and had a complaint against the Jews, the Hebraic Jews, about the distribution of food to the widows.

And in that case, in that context, the Hellenists referred not to Gentiles, for which we have a separate word, but to Jewish believers who had been Hellenized, Greek-speaking Jews, Jews who were culturally Greek, Hellenist.

We know that that was the case there because the Hellenist Jews are not contrasted with the Greeks and the Gentiles, but they are instead contrasted with Hebraic Jews. So it's Hellenized Jews versus Hebraic Jews.

[ 8 : 51 ] But here in chapter 11, the Hellenists are not contrasted with other Hebraic Jews, other Jews, but he's contrasted in general with Jews. It's the Hellenists versus the Jews, not the Hebrews versus the Grecian Jews.

So this here is an ethnic division. It's referring to the actual Greeks, the Gentiles. So some of the believers who had been scattered by the persecution that broke out against the church went about spreading the gospel to no one except Jews.

That was what most of them were doing. However, some of them who on coming to Antioch spoke not only to fellow Jews, not only to Hellenist Jews, but also to the Greeks, the Gentiles.

The Gentile mission of the church didn't begin in earnest until chapter 10 when Peter preached the gospel to Cornelius. And so then these believers who were preaching Jesus among the Greeks, they were doing so after that has already happened.

So then, not only did the persecution led by Saul lead to the gospel spreading to Samaritans, it's now going to the end of the earth, to among the Gentiles also. And this is a wonderful reminder of God's sovereignty to all of us.

[ 10 : 01 ] And it's a great comfort to me personally because when there are setbacks and disappointments in ministry, just like the persecuted church in Jerusalem experienced, we need not to hang our heads in despair because of God's sovereign work in and through all of that.

What we might see as regression, as a disappointment, we must remember that God might not see that way because we don't see personally all that God himself is doing.

We have seen similar patterns throughout church history. One notable one is when Constantinople fell to the Muslim Turks in 1453. It looked like the end of Christendom. The Byzantine Empire, Constantinople, was the heart, the capital of the Byzantine Empire which was the cultural and political center of Christendom.

And however, what happened with that was the church which was back then an empty shell in a lot of ways was exposed and the conquest, the Islamic conquest of Constantinople pushed a lot of the Eastern Greek-speaking biblical scholars to the West, to the Latin-speaking West.

And when that happened they brought their original Greek manuscripts of the New Testament with them. And at the time there was kind of a scholarly revival happening called Back to the Sources.

[ 11 : 28 ] They were trying to go back to the sources of the teachings and the things that they were learning and the Christians likewise were trying to go back to the sources. Let's go back to the scriptures, to the original scriptures and see what is taught.

See what we're supposed to believe. See how we're supposed to live. And because of this new influx of the original manuscripts of the Greek New Testament people were seeing things that they were never taught before.

They were seeing things again recovering these doctrines that were lost. And that led to the Renaissance and more particularly to the Protestant Reformation which led to an unprecedented period of restoration restoration and recovery and renewal in the church and sparked some much needed reforms.

Similarly, when our hard work appears to come to nothing, we have to remember that God is still sovereignly at work. Maybe some of you have been sharing the gospel with an unbelieving friend of yours.

She seemed really open to it until they suddenly turned and seemed to have closed the door on the gospel. Maybe some of you have experienced setbacks within your respective ministries that you serve in the church.

- [ 12 : 42 ] You thought the team was growing and thriving but then you lost some people, there were some disagreements on how to go about things and now you feel like there's been a setback. Maybe you were discipling or personally ministering to someone, to another believer in the church and you thought you had taken two steps forward but now you feel like you've taken three steps backward.

Whatever the case might be, don't be discouraged. Remember that God is at work in ways that you do not see.

We can keep on plowing, keep on sowing, keep on praying, keep on speaking the word knowing that God is at work in ways we can't discern.

Note also the emphasis on speaking the word in verses 19 to 20. Some of the scattered believers traveled as far as Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch speaking the word to no one except Jews.

But there were some of the men of Cyprus and Cyrene who on coming to Antioch spoke to the Hellenists also preaching the Lord Jesus. Gospel ministry involves speaking. If you want to see your family, friends, and neighbors saved by Jesus, you must speak the word of Jesus.

- [ 13 : 58 ] There's a famous saying that is often attributed to Francis of Assisi goes something like this, preach the gospel at all times, when necessary, use words. It's an appealing sentiment because we all squirm a little bit at the thought of having to break out of our comfort zones to share the gospel and actually speak it to somebody.

The reality is Francis of Assisi never said such a thing. The quote is actually a misleading paraphrase of what Francis actually said. And this is the actual quote, No brother should preach contrary to the form and regulation of the Holy Church, nor unless he has been permitted by his minister.

The minister should take care not to grant this permission to anyone indiscriminately. All the friars, however, should preach by their deeds. Far from saying that the preaching the gospel with words is usually unnecessary, he was so concerned with ensuring that the preaching of the gospel is done faithfully, he was trying to stop friars who were doing it poorly while still encouraging them to live in a manner worthy of the gospel until they can be properly trained and authorized to do so.

He believed that preaching the gospel with words was of utmost importance. If news can be spread without words, there would be no need for newspapers and news anchors.

The good news that Jesus is the messianic king sent by God to save us, that he died on the cross for our sins and was raised from the dead for our justification, that if we repent of our sins and believe in Jesus, we can be saved, that we can receive the Holy Spirit and have eternal life.

- [ 15 : 40 ] This good news cannot be conveyed by deeds alone. The good news of Jesus Christ must be spoken. And the people we must speak the word of Christ to are all the nations, all peoples.

Though some of the Jewish Christians spoke the word to no one except Jews, others of them spoke to the Hellenists also. They crossed ethnic lines and preached the gospel to the Greeks, the Gentiles also.

And this latter group of Christians who spoke to the Hellenists are commended in verse 21. It says, And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number of who believed turned to the Lord. God blessed their ministry so that a great number of Greeks believed and turned to the Lord.

For decades now, what missiologists call, scholars of missions theology, called the homogeneous unit principle, has dominated Christian thinking about missions for decades.

A proponent of that principle famously encapsulated the principle when he said, quote, men like to become Christians without crossing racial, linguistic, or class barriers.

[ 16 : 53 ] For this reason, he argued that Christians should evangelize within existing cultural lines and social networks because that's when the church grows the fastest. However, there's a big difference between saying that this is the way things often are and saying that that is the way things should be.

The fact that that's the easiest and fastest way to do things or to grow a church does not mean that that is the best way to do things. When applied, the homogeneous unit principle has meant evangelizing along racial lines in America, along tribal lines in Africa, along economic lines in South America and along caste lines in India, and so on.

In contrast, however, throughout the book of Acts, we see believers proclaiming the gospel to all people, Jews and Gentiles, men and women, slave and free, rich and poor, without partiality, without distinction.

In fact, the very breaking down of the dividing wall of hostility between Jews and Gentiles that Paul speaks of in Ephesians chapter 2 is a distinguishing mark of the church. This is why theologian Edmund Clowney has gone so far as to say that the point at which human barriers are surmounted is the point at which a believer is joined to Christ and his people.

Here in verses 19 to 20, we see that while the scattered Jewish Christians spoke the word to no one except Jews, some of them spoke to the Hellenists also. Unless someone crosses racial and ethnic and cultural and socioeconomic boundaries to speak the word of Christ, the gospel will never reach all the nations.

[ 18 : 44 ] And that's our explicit commission from our Lord. Make disciples of all nations. Be witnesses of Jesus Christ not only in Jerusalem to the Jews but also to all Judea and Samaria among the Samaritans and also to the end of the earth among the Gentiles.

We are called to bear witness not only to people who are of our own culture only, of our own language only, of our own race only, of our own socioeconomic class only, but to all peoples.

Evangelists speak the gospel to all. And note that these evangelists are everyday Christians. They were not one of the twelve commissioned in Acts 1.

They were not even one of the seven commissioned in Acts 6. In fact, these evangelists are not even named. We don't even know who they were. But nonetheless, they spoke the gospel to these Greeks and the hand of the Lord was with them and a great number who believed turned to the Lord.

There are evangelists among us in our church as well. I know that some of you are doing one-on-one Bible studies or book readings with other friends who are unbelievers, sharing the gospel with them in that context.

[ 20 : 02 ] I know that some of you are considering going into cross-cultural missions as witnesses for Jesus Christ. May you do so more and more. May God raise up more evangelists from our midst and let us remember that evangelism is not something that's reserved for only gifted evangelists but something that every Christian is called to do.

And it says in verse 22 that when, the report of this came to the years of the church in Jerusalem, they sent Barnabas to Antioch. That's my second point. The apostles established. It seems that the twelve apostles based in Jerusalem were responsible for authorizing and incorporating new congregations to the larger church.

So in the same way that they sent Peter and John as delegates to Samaria in Acts 8, 14 to 17, this time they delegate the task to Barnabas who travels to Antioch.

And then as we see in the following verses, Antioch in turn recruits Saul for his ministry in Antioch and it says in verse 26 that for a whole year they met with the church and taught a great many people.

In our context, modern day, this looks a lot like the extra-local denominational leaders who play this kind of role sometimes for churches. For example, our regional denominational leaders ensure that the pastors that we are ordaining as a local church uphold the Sovereign Grace Church's statement of faith.

[ 21 : 31 ] And they help us by administering some of the ordination exams. When we plant the new church in partnership with our denomination, Sovereign Grace Churches, they offer not only financial assistance, they also help in assessing and training leaders.

Sometimes they send members of their church to be a part of our church plants. This kind of partnership that extends beyond the local church provides accountability and protection for local churches.

We just had the privilege of having a leader in our denomination, a pastor from a sister church in this past weekend, Andy Farmer, to equip us and encourage us this past weekend.

And as a pastor, I personally derive a lot of encouragement through these kinds of inter-church relationships. So in this way, evangelists speak the word and apostles establish the church.

Third, shepherds exhort. Look at verses 22 to 24 with me. It says that when the report of this came to the ears of the church in Jerusalem, they sent Barnabas to Antioch. When he came and saw the grace of God, he was glad and he exhorted them all to remain faithful to the Lord with steadfast purpose.

[ 22 : 40 ] For he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And a great many people were added to the Lord. Barnabas was the perfect choice really for sending to Antioch for several reasons.

First, we know from Acts 4.36 that Barnabas was a native of Cyprus himself. Since the Jewish believers who preached Jesus to the Greeks in Antioch were men of Cyprus and Cyrene, it is possible that Barnabas already knew some of these believers and had a relationship with them.

Secondly, we also know from Acts 4.36 that Barnabas' actual name was Joseph, but that he was nicknamed Barnabas, which means son of encouragement. He was a man known for encouraging and exhorting those around him.

Remember when Paul returned to Jerusalem after his conversion because of his history of persecuting the church, rounding up Christians and putting them into jail and getting them killed? The apostles were understandably wary of them and at that time when they were not willing to take the risk and bring Paul into their midst, it was Barnabas who went and grabbed Saul and brought him in and introduced him to the apostles.

And later, in Acts 15, we'll also see that when Saul or Paul, his Roman name, when Paul insists on not taking John and Mark along with them on their missionary journey because formerly John and Mark had deserted them, it's Barnabas who insists on giving John and Mark a second chance.

[ 24 : 14 ] Barnabas was a man who always thought the best of people. He always saw the good in people. He encouraged people in it.

And that's precisely what Barnabas does in verse 23. When he came and saw the grace of God, he was glad and he exhorted them all to remain faithful to the Lord with steadfast purpose.

the word translated exhorted is the verb form of the word encouragement in Barnabas, son of encouragement. I'm sure this new church in Antioch was not perfect just like every other church that's ever existed.

Particularly considering the fact that this included Greek converts who were really new to this whole faith, Jewish faith or the Christianity. they were probably doing a lot of things wrong.

They probably were clueless about a lot of things. But nevertheless it says that when Barnabas came and saw the grace of God he was glad. However imperfect this church may have been, Barnabas acknowledged the grace of God at work among them.

[ 25 : 25 ] He saw that they were genuine believers and he was gladdened in his heart because of it. and he exhorted them to be faithful to the Lord with steadfast purpose.

Though uncertainties and doubts can creep into the minds and hearts of young believers especially new believers, Barnabas exhorted them to be unwavering in their faith in the Lord.

I thank God that we have many such encouragers in our church. I've personally been built up by and encouraged by some of you when I've been discouraged at times.

And I've heard of many instances of you all counseling one another, comforting one another, exhorting one another. I pray that you'll do so more and more.

And that God would raise up more and more people like Barnabas in our church, sons and daughters of encouragement. Let's be a people who even in the midst of difficulties, even in the midst of disagreements and conflicts, a people who can see the grace of God at work in each other, who can celebrate that and thank God for that, encourage one another in that.

[ 26 : 43 ] But how can we become more like Barnabas? Verse 24 tells us why Barnabas was the way he was. It says, for he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith.

good. The word good is an adjective that is particularly associated with God throughout the scriptures. That's what Jesus says in Mark 10, 18, no one is good except God alone.

Barnabas was a good man, meaning he was a godly man. He exemplified the goodness of God in his own dealings with others.

He was a man of integrity. He was also full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. He was not controlled by his own impulses and selfish desires. He was controlled by the Spirit who indwelt him.

And the power of the Spirit of God was evidenced in his ministry in whatever he did. He was also full of faith. Barnabas was not a man who did things merely by what he could see, how he felt.

[ 27 : 46 ] He's someone who acted and made decisions according to what he believed, what he knew to be true through his faith in the Word of God. Barnabas was an effective encourager and bridge builder in this church, not because he had mastered some strategy of making friends and influencing people, but because he was a good man, because he was a godly man.

There is no shortcut or silver bullet to spiritual power. If you want to empower people, you must be empowered by the Holy Spirit. If you want to produce praying disciples, you must be a man and woman of prayer yourself.

Let's pray that we might be filled with the Spirit more and more, as Barnabas was, to come under his influence and power more and more, to come under the influence of God's Word more and more, so that we too might be good man and woman who can encourage and build up others.

And as Barnabas is serving this way in verse 24, he says, a great many people, more people are added to the Lord. My fourth point is this, teachers teach. The addition of great many people produced some new needs in this new church in Antioch, and others needed to step up to fill the void.

He says in verses 25 to 26, so Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul, and when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. For a whole year they met with the church and taught a great many people, and in Antioch the disciples were first called Christians.

[ 29 : 20 ] Barnabas traveled to Tarsus to recruit Saul for his ministry in Antioch, and Saul, it appears, was a particularly effective teacher. Later in Acts 14, 12, we learn that when Barnabas and Saul are traveling together on their missionary journeys, Saul came to be known as the chief speaker, likely because he was maybe more knowledgeable about the word or theology or because he was a more effective teacher.

this is an important aspect of being a part of the church. When Jesus commissioned his apostles in Matthew 28, 18 to 20, he didn't merely command them to baptize people.

He told them to teach them to observe everything I have commanded you. Discipling others does not end with conversion.

It doesn't end with baptism. It continues with teaching everything that Jesus has commanded us. So it's reductionistic and simplistic to say, well, I believe the gospel and that's all that matters.

There's something wrong with the baby that doesn't grow after being born. Likewise, there's something wrong with the Christian who is born again through faith in Jesus Christ by the Spirit of God and yet does not grow in faith and obedience to his or her Lord Jesus Christ.

[ 30 : 39 ] teachers are a gift to the church given by God to instruct us in the will of God. Once again, I'm grateful for the teachers that God has placed in our midst.

There are many people among us who are gifted to study the Bible deeply and then to communicate the findings clearly. I pray that God will bless all of you to do so more and more for his glory as well.

Fifth, prophets prophesied. It says in verses 27 to 28, Now in these days prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch and one of them named Agabus stood up and foretold by the Spirit that there would be a great famine over all the world.

This took place in the days of Claudius. A group of prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch and they used their gifts to minister to the church there, the new growing church in Antioch.

Agabus was one of those prophets. He was a highly gifted and a prominent prophet in the early church. We'll encounter him again later in Acts chapter 21.

[ 31 : 45 ] And it says that he foretold by the Spirit that there would be a famine, great famine over all the world. The phrase over all the world doesn't literally refer to the entire globe, but is a phrase that is often used in ancient literature to refer to the entire inhabited world known at the time or to the Roman Empire more narrowly.

And Luke adds an editorial note here to confirm that the famine did indeed occur in the days of Claudius, which was between 41 and 54 AD.

Other historians corroborate that this famine did take place. It was a widespread famine that encompassed Egypt, Syria, Judea, and Greece during 45 to 47 AD, which would have been about a year after Agabus' prophecy.

And this prophecy enabled the church in Antioch, which was wealthier than the church in Judea, to collect and send relief to the saints there, the brothers living in Judea.



Prophecy is a gift of the Holy Spirit by which a believer receives and then communicates divine revelation. And the purpose of it is to build up the church, as it says in 1 Corinthians 14.

[ 33 : 00 ] Prophecy is not something that adds to the salvific content of Scripture. Scriptures, as it says in 2 Timothy 3.15, are able to make us wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

Prophecy doesn't add anything to that. It's not something that is normative and authoritative for all Christians at all times in all places. Rather, prophecy has a more specific circumstantial content.

For example, Agabus' prophecy applied to people in that particular place at that particular time. It does not apply to us. Similarly, when people prophesy in our church, it's a prophecy that's given in that particular time to this particular people to build them up.

Prophecy was not something that our church was historically strong in. But 1 Corinthians chapter 14, verse 1, teaches us to pursue love, and earnestly desire the spiritual gifts, especially that you may prophesy.

So that's what we did. We invited a team of prophets from a sister church in our denomination to visit us a couple years ago. They preached for us and did a prophecy seminar for us, which was a powerful time of ministry for many of you who were able to participate.

[ 34 : 20 ] We prayed earnestly that God would impart and distribute the gifts of prophecy more liberally among us. And he has answered that prayer to a large degree. not only has God brought in new people who have the gifts of prophecy, he has also raised up from our own midst people with gifts of prophecy.

I'm so thankful for many of you who use your gifts to build up our church in this way. You have been hearing regularly from these prophets, people with gifts of prophecy during our church services.

many of you have not heard from other prophets in our church who also have strong gifts of prophecy, some of whom have not been able to come during COVID during extenuating circumstances.

But I look forward to, I can't wait to have you all hear from them also, Lord willing, in the near future. Sixth, disciples give.

It says in verses 29 to 30, so the disciples determined everyone according to his ability to send relief to the brothers living in Judea. And they did so, sending it to the elders by the hand of Barnabas and Saul.

[ 35 : 28 ] The disciples of Jesus Christ in Antioch determined everyone according to his ability to send relief to the brothers living in Judea. From the very beginnings of the church here in Acts, we see that the early church, there was inter-church partnership among them.

Christians in the early church didn't have the attitude of, well, I care about my own local church and nothing else. They were partnered with each other and served each other.

We see this in the repeated mentions of other believers' travels and the act of sending out believers to other churches throughout this passage. Verse 22, they sent Barnabas to Antioch.

Verse 27, now in these days prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. Verse 29, the disciples determined to send relief to the brothers living in Judea. And finally, verse 30, they did so, sending it to the elders by the hand of Barnabas and Saul.

The more theologically mature and spiritually gifted congregation in Jerusalem sent others who were gifted from their church to minister to the burgeoning church in Antioch. And likewise, the new church in Antioch, which was more financially wealthy, better off, then sent financial gifts to the church in Judea in order to help them in anticipation of the famine in a time of need.

[ 36 : 51 ] I've seen you guys do this also time and time again. I've seen many of you give generously to the needs of this church.

I remember last year when in a span of two weeks, each of you gave according to your own ability and we collected \$20,000 toward the COVID emergency fund.

which we have now designated as part of our benevolence fund to help the needy saints among us. Over the last four years, we have given a cumulative sum of around \$40,000 to Sovereign Grace Churches, our denomination, much of which has been used to help needy sister churches and to plant new churches throughout the U.S. and abroad.

In partnerships like this, we can accomplish more toward Christ's mission than we can on our own. And I pray that God will help us to do so and lean into these partnerships more and more in the future.

Notice that the word church is used twice in this passage. First in verse 22, where it refers to the church in Jerusalem. Second in verse 26, where it refers to the church in Antioch. This shows that the church in Antioch, made up of new Greek believers, is just as much a church as the original church in Jerusalem, made up primarily of Jews, Jewish converts.

[ 38 : 24 ] There may be multiple congregations, multiple local churches, but there is one universal church. Though many of the believers in the church in Antioch likely have never met the believers in the church in Jerusalem, they still call them brothers in verse 29, out of their recognition that they are members of the same family of God.

Christians all over the world look different and they talk differently. We have many differences among us. Christians in the south are very different from the Christians in the north.

Christians in Africa and Asia are very different from the Christians in Europe. But we must remember that Christ binds us all together by one spirit. He says at the end of verse 26 that in Antioch the disciples were first called Christians.

I love that little insertion by Luke, the historian here. The form of the word Christian suggests that it was a word that had Latin origins, which means it's not a term that the Christians adopted for themselves.

rather it's a term that others label them with, probably the Romans. It may well have been a derogatory term, which started as the church was starting to establish itself among the Greeks.

[ 39 : 48 ] Now that there were Greek converts joining the church, they can no longer just call Christianity a Jewish sect. They were like, what do we call these guys? Oh, let's call them Christians, since they follow that guy that they call the Christ.

But the Christians embraced that label. Because they were proud to follow a man named Jesus, who is the Christ, the Messiah, the King, the Son of God, who died to save them and was raised from the dead victoriously.

A couple years ago, I met a Christian chaplain at a prominent university. It was like a gathering for ministers. And he was supposed to be a Christian chaplain for this university, but he not only denied the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, he expressly refused to call himself a Christian.

He called himself instead a follower of Jesus the Nazarene. Nazarene. I respectfully told him and quoted this verse to him, in Antioch, the disciples were first called Christians.

And tried to talk to him about the fact that you can't associate yourself with Christ and then dissociate yourself with Christ's body, his bride, his people.

[ 41 : 24 ] That Christian, the term, has a venerable heritage. That we are not merely followers of some man named Jesus who did some good works and then said some wise things.

But that we are those who have pledged allegiance to Jesus called the Christ, the King, the Messiah, the Savior of the world. And that we are called to submit to him and follow him in all of life.

I think there are people who increasingly, in this area especially, were embarrassed to be called Christians. Who are embarrassed of other Christians.

Sometimes I see Christians Christians who are more critical and more slanderous toward other Christians than unbelievers. That should not be the case.

There was a time when I was this immature elementary school kid in South Korea growing up. I had, for a short time, my paternal grandfather living with me and my family.

[ 42 : 46 ] And being the insecure and socially awkward kid that I was, I was so embarrassed of my grandfather. I didn't want him to come to my school.

So I told him, don't come anywhere near my school. Of course, he comes, of all things, picking up garbage, trying to clean up the area. And I was mortified.

I was like, grandfather, I told you not to come. I was really mean to him. Scolded at him. Even though he probably had more reasons to be embarrassed of me than I had of him.

I'm ashamed of that now, looking back. Because no matter how much I didn't want to be associated with him, he was my grandfather.

He was proud of me because I was his only grandson. I didn't want anything to do with him. It's the same way for us.

[ 43 : 53 ] You might be embarrassed by some of the political views of Christians, some of the things that they said, some of the things that they do, some of the things that we have, churches have done throughout church history.

Well, if they got to take a good look at us and have a relationship with us, to be honest, they'll probably be embarrassed of all of us as well. But none of that changes the fact that if we have faith in the Christ who died and was raised, we belong to the same family of God.

Remember this, brothers and sisters, before you are anything else, you are a Christian. And as such, let us embrace the church of God, love his people, serve his people, because the church grows as its interdependent members partner and serve together in the grace of God.

Let me close by reading a part of this Charles Spurgeon quote that Andy Farmer shared last Sunday. It's very impactful for me. He says, I felt that I could not be happy without fellowship with the people of God.

I wanted to be wherever they were. And if anybody ridiculed them, I wished to be ridiculed with them. And if people had an ugly name for them, I wanted to be called by that ugly name.

[ 45 : 27 ] For I felt that unless I suffered with Christ in his humiliation, I could not expect to reign with him in his glory. Heavenly Father, we pray that you will help us to be a people who are unashamed of the gospel.

help us to be a people who are unashamed of the people who are unashamed of the gospel. For it is the power of God for salvation for those who believe. Help us to remember our identity as Christians.

That we belong to you. And that for that reason, we belong to one another as brothers and sisters in Christ.

help us to love and serve one another as you command us to. In Jesus' name we pray.  
Amen.