

# The Pattern of an Apostolic Church

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] Well, it would be a great help if you have the Bibles open at Acts chapter 20. And we're going to think in this next few Sunday mornings of what it means to have the pattern of an apostolic church.

And today particularly about the perspective of true apostolic ministry. What does it mean to be a true church? Or more specifically, a true apostolic or New Testament church?

Well, of course, people give different answers to that question. For some, it means being linked to Christ's apostles by a physical bond, that of episcopal succession.

That is traced right back to the very first apostles and particularly to Peter. That would be the position of the Church of Rome and also of many high Anglicans. That it is the laying hands of a continuous unbroken line of bishops going right back to the apostles that makes a church today a truly apostolic church.

Others would think very differently and say that it is a link to the original apostles and the New Testament church, but it's a link by an experiential bond.

[ 1 : 2 5 ] We must experience the same, well, for example, charismatic gifts as those exercised by the apostles. You would find that among those churches that call themselves today apostolic churches.

And many like them. Well, those are two answers, but in fact, it has to be said that the New Testament itself doesn't really give any emphasis at all to either one of these two types of links.

And yet the apostles themselves are very, very concerned with ensuring that after their own passing, the church would remain truly apostolic.

Rooted in, as Jude says, the faith that is once for all delivered to the saints. So, for example, we have Paul's pastoral letters, and perhaps especially 2 Peter, that make it very, very clear what it means to have the marks of an apostolic church.

And it focuses for us two particular things. First of all, an apostolic church will have the true apostolic teaching, the true doctrine, the true gospel.

[ 2 : 3 8 ] But second, it will also exhibit the true apostolic pattern of ministry and of mission. In other words, it will be a gospel church and a missionary church.

So, for example, just 2 Timothy 1, verse 13, Paul says, Follow the pattern of the sound words that you heard from me in faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.

The sound words, the teaching. 2 Timothy 3, 10, Paul says, You, however, have followed my teaching, but not only that, my conduct and my aim in life.

It's not just what you believe that the apostles are interested in, it's what you do with what you believe. And these are the things that mark out true, genuine apostolic churches from the false.

Whatever the claims, whatever the language of the latter might be. So, we need to have the true apostolic teaching and the true apostolic vision, if you like, pattern of ministry.

[ 3 : 51 ] Now, for the apostolic teaching, we have, obviously, all of the letters of the New Testament, Ephesians, Romans, Galatians, and so on. But one of the purposes, at least one of the purposes of the Acts of the Apostles, is to give us a real insight into the pattern, the vision of apostolic ministry and mission, especially Paul's.

It's the pattern that God so manifestly blessed, as we see the gospel promises all coming to fulfillment, as indeed the word of God is proclaimed to all of the known ancient world.

Remember the purpose of Acts. It's Luke's second book. The very beginning of his first book, Luke's gospel, he tells us that he's written it so that Theophilus and others in his church, and others beyond, no doubt, so that they might have certainty about the apostolic gospel and its mission that they've heard.

In other words, so that they might be able to know and recognize genuine apostolic ministry and genuine apostolic churches. Now, it's a very, very important question still for us today.

What is real gospel ministry? And what isn't? When all kinds of claims are made using the same language of the Christian faith.

[ 5 : 06 ] Everybody says they're evangelical. Everybody says they're gospel-oriented. But how do you tell the real thing? Well, here in Acts chapter 20, we have Paul explicitly giving a handover from a founding apostle, a handover to those who are going to carry on that ministry afterwards, and maintain apostolic churches in the post-apostolic time.

He's saying farewell in person for the last time to these elders in Ephesus. It's quite an extraordinary meeting here of the presbytery of Ephesus down at the seaside in Miletus.

It's unlike any presbytery meeting that I've ever attended, or I think I'm ever likely to attend. But it's preserved for us to teach us what Paul wants a church that is to remain apostolic to really look like.

And again, presbytery minutes aren't usually anything like as inspiring as these presbytery minutes in Acts chapter 20. Maybe we could take a look and see if we could improve them a bit along these lines.

But this is a long chapter, and it will repay careful thought. We're going to spend perhaps two or three mornings on it, and I hope that you will take time also to read it carefully yourself.

[ 6 : 23 ] But today, I just want to pick up one strand, one strand of the teaching that's contained here of what it means to be a truly apostolic church. I want to look at what we're shown here about what the perspective is in a truly apostolic church.

And what this chapter exhibits for us unmistakably, and what we see of the Apostle Paul's example and his urging of these church leaders for the future, is that a truly apostolic church will always have as its clear perspective the advance and the growth of the kingdom of Christ.

It will be a church that has a clear mission perspective. Now, clearly that's something that's obvious throughout the whole book of Acts.

But in just this chapter alone, I think we can see three very clear features of what true mission perspective looks like. And it's important that we ask what it really does mean to have a true missionary perspective, because these days the word mission seems to be used to mean almost anything, from soup kitchens to interfaith services.

So we have to know and understand what we mean. What does a missionary perspective mean in apostolic terms? What will such a church look like? Well, the first thing is this.

[ 7 : 53 ] It will be a God-centered and a gospel-oriented church, not a man-centered and a felt-needs-oriented church.

This is very basic, right? From the beginning of the book of Acts, Luke is very, very concerned to show us that it's all God's mission. It's mission by him, and it's mission about him.

Verse 1 tells us that Luke says in the first book, he wrote about what Jesus began to do and teach. And the Acts of the Apostles is what Jesus continues to go on doing through the Holy Spirit at work in the life of the church.

In many ways, really, it should be called the Acts of the Holy Spirit rather than the Acts of the Apostles. It's God's mission, and God is directing it by his Spirit who is given for the very purpose of mission.

Remember Acts 1.8? You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, and you will be my witnesses. The Spirit is given for the sake of mission.

[ 9 : 00 ] And therefore, the Spirit of God is in charge of the messengers. It's not the other way around. And it's precisely this God-centered and gospel-oriented priority that we see reflected in the Apostle Paul's ministry.

And we see it very clearly here. Just look, for example, at verses 22 to 25. I'm going to Jerusalem, says Paul. I'm determined. But the Spirit of God is in total control of him.

It's constraining him. Verse 23 says that it's despite the afflictions that he absolutely certainly knows will await him that he's going because the Holy Spirit of God is in charge.

Verse 24, he says that his life, his own safety, his comfort, all of his own personal felt needs, all of these things are totally subordinate to the purpose of God and his gospel.

All he wants, says verse 24, is that the ministry that I receive from the Lord Jesus Christ will be fulfilled. What matters for Paul is not his own personal circumstances, not his safety, not his ambitions, not his security, nothing else.

[ 10 : 13 ] Verse 24, he says, what matters is to testify to the gospel of the grace of God. His is a totally God-centered and gospel-oriented mission.

Now, that seems very obvious, almost too obvious to say. Certainly, it's easy for it to trip off our lips, isn't it? But isn't it so easy, actually, to get this completely in reverse?

So that in the church, we so quickly become man-centered? So that our own perceived needs are the things that become paramount in our thinking?

So that our gospel must be a gospel that meets our personal needs? That the Holy Spirit really is there to serve us and even to be used by us.

It's easy for us to think like that because, of course, that is what the world wants. The world loves religion. The world loves spirituality because it's there to serve me.

[ 11 : 21 ] It's there to help me. It's there to meet my needs, to empower my life. That's what people are looking for in religion, in spirituality, everywhere. Of course.

But the world doesn't want discipleship. Does it? The world doesn't want discipleship where I serve God. Where I'm accountable to Him.

Where I'm controlled by Him. Certainly not if it means I have to be morally accountable. No, not in your life. And you see, because all of us at heart are worldly, we all want this kind of religion.

We want this kind of spirituality. We want to keep the language of the apostolic church, but in fact, in practical terms, actually totally reverse its perspective.

We want to put ourselves at the center. So the gospel becomes all about us and not God and His Spirit. The gospel is all about meeting our demands, not about serving the mission of God and His kingdom.

[ 12 : 26 ] Now, that's very contemporary, but there's nothing new about that. If you look back, if you did read in Acts chapter 19, from verse 30 onwards, you'll see the episode that happened in Ephesus with the seven sons of Sceva.

These were men who witnessed the power of God at work through Paul's ministry and they wanted some of that power. They didn't want the lordship of Jesus. They thought they could have one without the other.

They wanted the Holy Spirit as a tool for them to use, to serve them. And of course, they got themselves in very deep water. They got a terrible shock, didn't they?

But that's just exactly the same thing as happens in so many different ways today. There are some in the church today who really feel that the Holy Spirit is primarily there to provide miraculous wonders and so on for their own sake.

The whole perspective is focused on health or on healing or on prosperity. As though our personal well-being were paramount, although our needs being answered was the all-important thing in the church.

[ 13 : 39 ] Well, that's the very opposite, isn't it, to Paul's God-centered and gospel-oriented approach. Whatever was happening to him, in every circumstance, affliction.

That's not what matters, says Paul. Similarly, in a different way, there are many in the church today who want to use the language of the Holy Spirit almost blasphemously, as though God's main purpose was to affirm them in their chosen lifestyle, in their chosen behavior, in the way they want to act.

That was the constant refrain that I heard in many speeches at our General Assembly. The Holy Spirit is leading the church into new light to see new ways, to affirm new ways of behavior.

Totally contrary to the Scriptures. But no, says Paul, that's not the way it is. That's the wrong way around. The Holy Spirit leads us to testify to the gospel of the grace of God.

You see it also among some Christian leaders, preachers, evangelists, and so on, who make their whole ministry all about building their own movement, boosting their own influence, influence, really under it, their own egos.

[ 15 : 00 ] But no, says Paul, all of these things are the very opposite of a God-centered, gospel-oriented perspective. They may use the language of that, they may give the appearance of godliness, but it totally denies the power of God.

Now a truly apostolic ministry is God-centered, and therefore its total priority always will be whatever the circumstances, as verse 24 says, testifying to the gospel of the grace of God, the truth of God.

The Holy Spirit is given for testimony, for testimony to God and about God. So that's the first thing. A church that is truly apostolic in perspective must be marked out by being God-centered and gospel-oriented, not man-centered and needs-oriented.

It's not marked by this, it's not a true missionary church. But if it is centered in its outlook and its focus on God and the gospel, then secondly, it will certainly also have a perspective that is global and dynamic, not parochial and static.

It will be a church taken up and involved with what God is doing. And what God is doing is dynamic. It's dynamic.

[ 16 : 23 ] It's moving in at least three dimensions. First of all, we see in the book of Acts that the whole thing pulses from beginning to end with a forward, onward momentum.

It begins with that promise to the ends of the earth. It ends with Paul in Rome preaching the gospel at the heart of the known world, proclaiming the kingdom with people from all over the world coming to him.

It's an onward momentum. It's a wonderful picture of Jesus' words in Matthew 16. I will build my church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

And here in chapter 20, we see that onward thrust in Paul's own perspective. He's obviously a man who's on the move. Look over to chapter 19, verse 21.

There he's preaching in Ephesus, the very center of Asia. But he's not content just to reach the whole of the promise of Asia. No, he says, I must also see Rome. You see, Paul's a man with a vision, but he's also got a strategy.

[ 17 : 25 ] He focused on Ephesus. It was a great city so that he could reach the whole of the province of Asia. But he wants to get to Rome because all roads lead to Rome. That's the key to the whole world.

So to Rome he must go. You see, gospel ministry is dynamic. By its nature, it must spread. If we haven't grasped that about the gospel of Jesus, we haven't really understood the gospel at all.

We can't ever be content with the present situation. We can't be static if we're a gospel church. There must be forward momentum.

So a church that's truly apostolic will always have this pulse of onward movement. It won't allow things to block the advance of the gospel. It'll put its mind, its efforts, its reasoning to unlocking gospel mission.

Whatever that takes. It will allow the dynamic of the gospel to shape and determine its structures and plans, not inhibit and restrict the forward movement of mission by its own inertia, by parochialism, by traditions.

[ 18 : 39 ] That means it has to be a church that's willing to sacrifice precious resources and people for the mission of the kingdom. The church in Ephesus wept to lose Paul.

They knew they would never see him again. What a huge loss that was to them and to their fellowship. What an extraordinary sacrifice for them to make, to let him go. Sometimes it's hard, isn't it, to let go some of our very best people to the mission field or to ministries.

But we can't be static and keep everything the same. We must be forward moving. But then there's also a dynamic in true apostolic ministry that has a sense of upward movement, upward momentum.

Paul's ministry is not just onward, he's focusing upward to the new heavens and the new earth. In verse 32 of chapter 20 he says that his word of the gospel is the word that will build you up and give you an inheritance with all of those who are sanctified with all the saints in glory.

It's not just that the God of Scripture and his gospel are always advancing and going on, but he's carrying his people with him. He's propelling you towards his eternal kingdom.

[ 19 : 57 ] The gospel of God has a destination, a glorious destination. I wonder if your perspective is dynamic in that sense that like Paul nothing matters as long as I fulfill the ministry given to me by Jesus.

Nothing matters as long as I reach the inheritance won for me with all the saints. nothing matters apart from those things. Is that how you think? I suspect that sometimes it's true to say perhaps often that our vision is very static and it is so really because we are so self-centered and therefore I tend to focus on me and what God's doing in my life and what I want him to do in my life.

But the reality is so different when we see it's God-centered, when we see that he's on the move. He's on the move from eternity through time to eternity.

His great plan of redemption it's unstoppable, it's moving. And Paul had such a sense of that dynamism that we are taken up in this great onward movement of God that we have a part in it, that we are heading for that inheritance.

Christianity is not a religion for earth, it's not a spirituality for today, it's a road to glory. It's moving upwards. And you see when we understand that it transforms our thinking, our perspective.

[ 21 : 33 ] If we grasp the onward march of the gospel of God, its progress as Christ is building his church, if we grasp the sense of upward momentum, of moving to a destination of glory with all the saints, when we grasp that, we'll also grasp the third dimension of gospel momentum, that's outwards.

The inheritance is one that we share with all who are sanctified, with people from the very ends of the earth, from every tribe and tongue and people and nation. And Paul is so conscious that he is the apostle to the Gentiles, to the nations, to the world.

God promised to Abraham at the beginning that blessing would be to all the world through him and Paul knows that through his gospel the blessing promised to Abraham is coming to the nations. And we can see even in this chapter his extraordinary global vision.

We see his mission perspective that gave such a global sense of responsibility both in mission and in fellowship. Just look at the first six verses there of chapter 20.

It's an extraordinary little condensed summary of Paul's travels. But I want you to notice what's hidden in those little verses. It speaks of Paul's immense breadth of concern for the church throughout the world.

[ 22 : 55 ] Verses 1 to 3 tell of journeys through all sorts of places in Macedonia and in Greece. Visits to all the churches that he planted before. Some of them we know very well.

Philippi, Thessalonica and many others. Verse 2 says he went through all of these regions to encourage the people. Now just think how energy sapping that was on foot throughout all these hot countries of the Mediterranean basin, Greece.

Think how sapping it was when verse 3 tells us that constantly there were threats to his life on top of all of this. And by the way on the way on this journey he wrote 2 Corinthians while he was in Macedonia.

That's there in verse 1. While he was in Greece he wrote Romans. So he didn't have much spare time on his travels. He has the spiritual good of the church in all the world in his heart.

And notice also the reason that he's on this journey in the first place. The reason why he's going to Jerusalem. Why he's stopping over in Troas and Miletus. Verse 16 tells us he's anxious to get to Jerusalem by Pentecost.

[ 24 : 07 ] Well why was that? By the way today's the day of Pentecost. Well Pentecost was symbolic. It was the time of the first fruit offerings.

And Romans chapter 15 tells us that Paul was on a mercy mission to aid the suffering church in Jerusalem. 1 Corinthians 16 that he'd written a year or so earlier when he was still in Ephesus gave instructions therefore to these churches in Greece to collect money for missions so that as Paul was passing through he'd be able to pick it up and take it with him along with some emissaries and that explains the names that you see there in verses 4 and 5.

These were all the names of those who travelled with Paul to take the gift. So do you see the point? The church in Jerusalem was suffering persecution and poverty and Paul himself had such a global perspective not just in terms of evangelism and nurture but also in terms of the practical needs of suffering believers that he shows his concern by leading that mercy mission himself and he's quite open about teaching the churches about their duty to give generous help you owe it to them he says to the Romans 2 Corinthians 8 and 9 you know these chapters about giving generously an apostolic church has a dynamic global outlook because it recognizes it has global responsibilities responsibilities in mission and evangelism always pushing out with the gospel but also in encouraging believers in far away places and that includes tangible help for hard pressed

Christian believers especially when they're in situations of persecution and of poverty that's why the Barnabas Fund is so valuable so necessary so it's quite a challenge isn't it for any congregation to ask ourselves are our priorities really global or are they parochial in real and tangible ways I mean think about your prayer life how much focus is there in yours and mine really on the world church how much interest do we really show how many missionary magazines or communications do we actually read and digest how much do we really pray constantly and persistently not just for our own missionaries but for many others working throughout the world how much do we do that compared with perhaps the amount of time we pray for our own selves and our own needs it's easy to pay lip service permission but actually to focus most of our time and energy on ourselves isn't it it's easy to talk the talk but what about in our

Christian giving it's a real challenge too isn't it it's easy to focus on ourselves even just on our own church to spend on things that really just benefit ourselves but think of the world think of the huge need for gospel mission just in this city alone never mind this nation and the nations of the world think of the need of the real suffering church in many places we need to do more than think of course we need to act says Paul in the right way we owe it to them it's true isn't it that increasingly these days we are looking to the church in the two-thirds world for a strong biblical stance on major issues as the church in the west drifts further and further away from the truth we see that all the time at our general assembly there was a letter from the synod of blantyre in malawi urging the church of scotland not to depart from the truth well don't we owe it to them to share what we do have and they don't have resources like learning and training we should be sending people shouldn't we and riches that we have spoke to a friend of mine in ministry this week and he was telling me that his church is urging him to have a full time secretary but he has said to them

[ 28 : 33 ] I'm not going to have that until we as a church have raised a substantial amount of support for a missionary couple that we're sending off to the Middle East I want them to see what the priorities should be well of course he should have both but that's the right way around isn't it an apostolic church is global and dynamic in its attitude to gospel mission it is not parochial and static must be if it's going to be God centered and gospel oriented because God's purpose is global well what makes a church like that what shapes a truly God centered and gospel oriented church with a dynamic global vision a church that isn't self centered that isn't parochial that isn't well static and stagnating well thirdly it will be this because it is a church devoted to the word of God and not distracted by wonders in other words it won't confuse the essentials of real gospel ministry with the incidentals that may accompany it and come alongside it something very striking that

I want you to notice here if you read chapter 19 you'll see that it accounts Paul's ministry in Ephesus over three years it was a remarkable time chapter 19 verse 8 tells us what a powerful ministry it was it was speaking boldly reasoning persuading many many people were converted it was marked by the miraculous verse 11 tells of healings and exorcisms even healing handkerchiefs for goodness sake it was marked by the extraordinary by riots by commotions verse 19 speaks about magicians burning their books public confessions all kinds of drama going on in that time in Ephesus quite an extraordinary account but what was Paul's take on all of that what does he tell us when he recounts in chapter 20 to the Ephesian elders what his ministry had all been about well look at chapter 20 verse 19 it wasn't macho or powerful says Paul it was weak

I was serving with all humility it wasn't superhuman verse 19 what was it full of tears and many trials you can't get more human than that it wasn't focused and obsessed with works of power and the extraordinary but rather Paul says verse 20 what was he taken up with thorough persistent patient full orb'd teaching of the word of God I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable and teaching you publicly and from house to house large groups and small groups that's what I was doing while I was there with you that was what was really important that's what's essential to an apostolic ministry Paul says he says it again and again here in different ways in verse 21 he's teaching what he says is the gospel of repentance and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ verse 24 he says it was the gospel of the grace of God he was teaching verse 25 it was proclaiming the kingdom

I was doing verse 27 it was proclaiming the whole counsel of God isn't that astonishing that's Paul's description of that remarkable ministry in Ephesus in chapter 19 that's not how the Ephesus evening times would have reported it the headline would have been handkerchief healings everywhere exclusive pictures by Kyriakos Dodds something like that but isn't that true and isn't it true that the church often has the same perspective as the worldly church and not the apostolic church isn't it true that the church so often becomes obsessed with the spectacular incidentals instead of the glorious gospel fundamentals for Paul it was all summed up as teaching through tears and trials that's what the ministry was about because that's what's really important and any truly apostolic church will be exactly the same it will be devoted to the word not distracted by talks of wonders and excitement and commotion and a church that is

God-centered and gospel oriented with a real global vision will be that only if it is a church engrossed and captivated and gripped by the primacy of many living ministries of the word of God the word of the gospel whatever it costs and it will always cost many tears and trials and in fact that is exactly the kind of church that we see here in chapter 20 in Troas in the little story from verses 7 to 12 and that explains why this story is here in this chapter why on earth would you include this story was this miraculous healing so special or distinct it hardly even seems worth a mention when you consider that just one verse in chapter 19 encapsulated three years of the most extraordinary miracles why would this one little event be set out here well I want to suggest it's set out here for us because it is an example of a truly extraordinary miracle but not in the way that you might first think in fact the miracle isn't the healing of this boy at all the very fact that we focus on that the very fact that in our

[ 34 : 39 ] Bibles the heading is Eutychus raised from the dead just shows us how back to front we so often are in our perspective how totally different we are from the apostle Paul just ignore that heading for a minute it's not inspired it's not part of the Bible text ignore the heading and look at the text which is the inspired word of God what's the emphasis verse 7 Paul talked with them they had one day with the apostle that was the priority to hear Paul's words not look at his travel photos not have a sing song listen to Paul verse 7b he talked on until midnight by this time visitors on holiday from St.



George's Tron were beginning to appreciate the short sermons they normally have verse 9 Paul talked still longer and this poor young chap falls out of the window and dies but do we get great drama do we have all the lurid details not at all verse 10 just a brief interlude with hardly any elaboration Eutychus is dead don't worry says Paul it's all right verse 11 let's have a snack and then let's get on and what happens he talked a long time more until daybreak then he went away and then a little p.s.

by the way they took the youth alive not a little comforted you can't get more understated than that can you so what would Luke's heading have been if he was writing headings for his bible text here well it most certainly would not have been Eutychus raised from the dead I think his heading would have been this the miracle of the all night sermon that's the real miracle in this story the emphasis is all on Paul's words the healing is totally incidental in fact it just goes to prove how totally focused this church were on the priority of the word that they could act in this way Paul just healed the boy and got on so that the teaching didn't have to be interrupted now let me ask you can you imagine a church anywhere that you know where that could happen could you let's just suppose Julie McGill fell out of the gallery here down on her head in the middle of the sermon and I was to pop down put my hand on her head she jumps up and goes back to her seat now do you think any of you would be able to listen to anything else we say after that well

I doubt it there'd be all kinds of commotion by the 630 service there'd be 10,000 people in here there wouldn't be the slightest bit listening interested in listening to anything they'd want to see if something like that would happen again isn't that right Kieran Dodds would be here with his photographs and all the rest of it but there wasn't any commotion like that in Troas they went straight back to what they knew was the vital thing what they knew was worth staying up all night to hear the apostolic gospel from the apostle Paul now don't make a mistake we're not supposed to look at these people as though they're in another league as though somehow they're superhuman they're not a different species this story is very human obviously it wasn't easy at all to sit late at night in a hot room listening to deep profound teaching from the apostle Paul the great encouragement to every preacher that people fall asleep under him but we are supposed to see how focused they were on the essentials on the priorities of the apostolic church the word of the apostolic gospel with all of its implications all of its ramifications for them not just a simple ABC but a full orbbed understanding of the whole counsel of

God no doubt Paul was preaching to the Romans in 2nd Corinthians he'd just written them he was giving them his commentary and it was because they were so focused on the essentials and not taken up with it other things and not likely to be diverted by them that God could actually perform that healing in the midst of them there's so much debate today in the church you know about whether we should expect these sort of miraculous things to continue in the church or whether they ceased with the time of the apostles but I think actually the far more pertinent and real question is whether there is enough maturity in the church for God to be able to do any of these things without his people being totally distracted without losing their focus on the real priority the ministry of the apostolic gospel in all of its forms because that alone is what produces God-centered and gospel focused churches that is alone what is able to prepare an inheritance for you with all the saints

[ 39 : 47 ] I personally don't have any doubt of some of the stories that I've heard from friends like Isaac Shaw of extraordinary miracles happening in frontier mission in parts of India even stories of resurrection from the dead I have no reason to disbelieve these but I do have grave doubts about the obsession in some western churches with so much in the way of signs and wonders at the expense of the word of God I do get very worried when people tell me they've been at some Christian conference and all they can talk about is the fact that so and so was healed of something and nothing at all about the ministry of the gospel it's interesting that Paul wrote first Corinthians from Ephesus in the midst of all this ministry of chapter 19 and yet to a church that was obsessed with all these wonders Paul said I'd rather speak five words in a plain tongue than ten thousand in a strange tongue he's constantly telling them to be mature to grow up to have a real apostolic perspective so you see what Paul is teaching the leadership of the Ephesian church their presbytery and what Luke is recording for us is telling us how to be a church with a truly apostolic perspective a perspective that will always be governed by the advance and the growth of the kingdom of God so it can never be man centered and needs oriented always must be

God centered and gospel oriented the spirit of God controls us we do not master and control him so is that us here it's a church that can never be parochial and static must always be global and dynamic in its outlook looking forward to see the gospel grow in advance looking upward towards the goal of where it's all going looking outward to the world deeply concerned for the world church and for those in the world yet to come into the church so is that us well if it's going to be such a church it will not be distracted by inessentials either the spectacular wonders and the miraculous or the mundane things of any kind that go along with ministry rather it will be devoted to the whole counsel of God which is the power of God for salvation which is the word of grace that is able to give us an inheritance among the saints is that us it's a great challenge isn't it to have the

Bible's plumb line hanging right in front of us held up to us as a congregation and to see just how closely we ally ourselves to that plumb line well there's a lot more in this chapter about the apostolic church but I think that's probably enough at least for one week for us to think about isn't it maybe as we meet together with one another and pray perhaps in twos and threes throughout the week as we do or in larger groups and homes maybe we can give some thought as to how we can sharpen one another up to have a truly apostolic perspective in our church life together but what better way to help us begin than to come now and gather around the Lord's table and to think upon the great center of the faith and the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ that is the source of all our mission so as we do that let's sing together from number 430 in our books chapter 3 in