

wrote to Titus, "There are many . . . deceivers . . . whose mouths must be stopped, who subvert whole houses, teaching things which they ought not . . . Wherefore rebuke them sharply that they may be sound in faith" (Titus 1:10, 11, 13).

Paul charged the elders of the church at Ephesus to carefully guard their church. "Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers [pastors], to feed the church of God . . . after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things [distorted doctrines], to draw away disciples after them. Therefore watch, and remember" (Acts 20:28-31).

It was written of the first believers in Jerusalem that "they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship" (Acts 2:42). The local church today must follow this example, and thus throw up the strongest defense against error.

3. *The church provides a place to receive power for service.*

It was never intended that the church be a place into which believers retreated when the going got tough and there wait for the needy to come for help. Rather, it is a place where believers can receive power that they might be fully equipped

to mount an offensive against the "gates of hell." What folly it is to attempt an offensive without the power of the Holy Spirit.

At an Early Church prayer meeting, recorded in Acts 4:23-33, the Christians reported on the fierce opposition of the unbelievers and then they united in prayer. The writer of Acts tells what follows: "When they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness. . . . And with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus" (Acts 4:31, 33).

This can happen to you as you unite with believers in the church and seek for the power of the Holy Spirit.

4. *The church is a fellowship of believers to whom we can turn in times of sorrow, sickness, or discouragement.*

Funeral services and other times of crisis become a means of great witness to the world as the church stands together (John 13:35; Acts 2:42-47; 4:23).

Every family faces times of sorrow, sickness, and discouragement. What a great joy it is to receive comfort and encouragement from fellow believers. "Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ" (Galatians 6:2).