**Grace to You** :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

**The Ties That Bind**
Scripture: 1 Peter 4:11, 2 Corinthians 7:1
Code: A308

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Have you ever noticed how different the individual members of the same family can be? One child may be melancholy while another is a live wire. One may be especially gifted in music, and another, who has no interest in music, may excel in sports. In some cases they look nothing like each other or even their parents. Yet the members of a family share a bond stronger than their differences.

In the same way, within the Body of Christ churches develop their own unique personalities. Some may insist on formal worship services, while others thrive in a relaxed atmosphere. But the most important thing about a church isn't the superficial things that make it different, but what it has in common with other Christian assemblies.

There are certain truths--fundamental doctrines--that every true church is committed to. These doctrines are unalterable; they cannot be compromised in any way. They are non-negotiable. Yield on any one point, and the church ceases to be a church. Here are five foundational truths that distinguish all authentic churches.

**A High View of God**

It is essential that a church perceive itself as a body of believers designed for the glory of God. Unfortunately, most churches today have deviated from that priority and developed a human focus: meeting man's felt needs. Instead of faithfully proclaiming God's sufficient Word to direct people's minds toward God, church leaders respond to superficial needs with temporary solutions like psychology, self-esteem, entertainment, or a myriad of other diversions.

As a result, the church is no longer an organism that emphasizes knowing and glorifying God; it is an organization that tries to help people feel good about themselves. But if you know and glorify God, you don't need to be concerned about your needs because "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom" (Prov. 9:10). When your relationship with God is right, your perspective on your needs will also be right. That doesn't mean we should ignore people's needs--we are to be concerned about people the same way God is. But there must be a balance, and it begins with a high view of God.

We must take God seriously and exalt Him. Yes, we are to reach out to people with the love of Christ, but God must be the focus of our worship and our life.

**The Absolute Authority of Scripture**

A second non-negotiable truth is the absolute authority of Scripture. God reveals Himself primarily through the pages of Scripture; that is why we must uphold it as our absolute authority.

Because we believe Scripture is true, we must proclaim it with conviction and without compromise or apology. The Bible makes bold claims, and Christians who believe it ought to affirm it boldly.

Anyone who faithfully and correctly proclaims the Word of God will speak with authority. It is not our own authority. Insofar as our teaching accurately reflects the truth of Scripture, it has the full weight of God's own authority behind it. That is a staggering thought, but it is precisely how 1 Peter 4:11 instructs us to handle biblical truth: "If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God."

If the Bible is true, then it is also authoritative. As divinely revealed truth, it carries the full weight of God's own authority. If you claim to believe the Bible at all, you ultimately must bow to its authority. That means making it the final arbiter of truth--the rule by which every other opinion is evaluated.

**Sound Doctrine**

Another non-negotiable for the church is sound doctrine. If you have a high view of God and are committed to Him, you will obey His Word. The content of God's Word is sound doctrine.

Countless Christians today are vague about doctrine. Many pastors offer short sermons that might excite or make their congregations feel better, but they have little to do with truths that matter. We need truths that we can hold on to--truths about God, life and death, heaven and hell, man and sin, redemption through Christ, the ministry of the Holy Spirit and angels, the believer's position in Christ, and Satan and his realm. You need to be able to read a biblical text, discover what it says, and draw out divine principles. God's people need solid doctrine to build their lives on.

**Personal Holiness**

We must draw lines when it comes to personal holiness and be careful what we expose ourselves and our children to. We dare not lower our standards to those of the world. Christians are called to live a pure life, and we can't compromise that.

Second Corinthians 7:1 says, "Having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God." A church must enforce that standard (see Matt. 18:15-17). That's why we implement church discipline where I pastor. If someone sins, we confront him or her for their own good and the good of the church as a whole.

Many Christians aren't as concerned about their personal holiness as they should be. Where are you in terms of holiness and real communion with the living God? Church leaders aren't the only ones who should live holy lives. You can't have a half-hearted commitment to God and expect Him to work through you.

**Spiritual Authority**

One more component that's true of a biblical church is spiritual authority. A church must understand that Christ is the head of the church (Eph. 1:22; 4:15) and that He mediates His rule in the church through godly elders (1 Thess. 5:13-14; Heb. 13:7, 17).

Hebrews 13 says to submit to those over you in the Lord, for they watch your souls. Follow their example. Paul says to "recognize those who labor among you, and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, and to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake" (1 Thess. 5:12-13).

I am one of many leaders at our church. I happen to be the one whom God chose to preach, but I am one elder among many. While there are variations in the giftedness of spiritual leaders, there is still an equality of spiritual authority among those the Bible calls elders or overseers. Such spiritual leadership is essential to the church of Jesus Christ. That's why the church must be committed to training and obeying godly leaders.

There is room for diversity within the Body of Christ. But every true church is united by certain non-negotiables. Make sure you and your church are committed to the ties that bind.

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