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

The Care of the Church
Scripture: Selected Scriptures
Code: 1289

I want to share just as we prepare for the Lord's Table some things that are on my heart just briefly. We heard a line in a song earlier tonight, "Dear Lord I give myself away, 'tis all that I can do." The last line of the hymn At the Cross, "Dear Lord I give myself away, 'tis all that I can do." I've sung that for years, but for some reason it hit me very hard tonight to hear that beautiful statement.

When I think about the cross of Jesus Christ it's easy for me to get emotional, it's easy for me to have certain feelings of gratitude and worship and praise, but what God is after is the reality of that statement; Dear Lord I give myself away, 'tis all that I can do. When we come to a time a worship like this, a time at the Lord's Table, a time when the music has sensitized our hearts to think about the Lord, it isn't just that emotion, it isn't just that thought, that praise, that worship that the Lord wants; he wants us. He wants all that we are to be given away in abandonment to Him and I guess that's really the burden that a pastor carries in a church that the people would so live to give themselves away to God.

You know, I was reading earlier today the letter of Paul to the Corinthians, the second letter, the 11th chapter, and Paul lists there all the difficulties of his ministry and then he adds in verse 28 that the most difficult of all was the care of the church, or in his case the churches, the care of the churches. Now what do you think it was that he was carrying in his heart? What was it about the care of the church that in many ways was worse than being beaten with rods? Worse than being whipped? Worse that being shipwrecked? Worse that being in peril of robbers? Worse than all of these things?

I believe he articulates it most beautifully in Colossians 1 when he says that he longs to see every Christian made complete in Christ. Or when he said he was in travail till Christ beformed in his people. It is the heart's desire of the shepherd of the sheep that they totally come to the place of commitment, of abandoning themselves to Christ and his purposes and his cause, and no one knows better than a pastor that people can be busy, they can be good people, they can be active to some extent in the church, they can be living religious lives, they can be coming to church and worshipping the Lord and yet still miss what is essential because they don't really abandon themselves totally to Christ.

And so I thought just with that as a sort of an introduction I wanted to share the five things that offer me the care of the church. This is what I care to see in you, and these are the things that no matter

what else you see, if you don't see these, there's anxiety in your heart. I suppose there are many people who come to church and I guess for them it's being there that is enough, and they'll come at their own pace and maybe even in addition to their normal pace when something special happens, and maybe there's a certain token involvement or activity, but there's not that abandonment and consequently we have those birth pangs that travail or soul until Christ be fully formed in an individual. And after all since in Hebrews it says we have to give an account for every one of you, we have a great responsibility. Let me give you five things, you know them, they're just reminders.

The first thing for which I care is that there be purity in your life, purity in your life. Over and over again in the New Testament we are called to purity. In 2 Corinthians 7:1 it says, "Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit perfecting holiness in the fear of God," cleansing ourselves, perfecting holiness in the fear of God. The great desire that I have for you is that you be pure in your life, that you be holy in your life, that you manifest Godliness in your life, and that means obedience. And that means when you sin and when I sin there must come confession and repentance turning from that sin. I believe that it is critical that if we are to live holy lives that we spend time communing with a Holy God, and it's very basic and yet it seems that we need reminder, there must be a faithful, daily, consistent prayer life, when you draw yourself into the presence of a thrice Holy God sensing in a time of awe and wonder his infinite majesty and purity. That's one important reason why 1 Thessalonians 5 says, "Pray without ceasing." It isn't a string an unceasing demands, it is a life of unceasing communion with the living God. And secondly, and basically as well, we are all very much aware of the fact that in order for us to have a pure life, David said that he must hide the word in his heart that he might not sin, there must be faithful study of the Word of God and I trust you're at this point in your Christian life daily in the Word of God, every day.

Personal study to show yourself approved unto God a workman needing not to be ashamed rightly dividing the word of truth. It isn't activity that you long to see, it isn't just attendance that you care to see; it's purity that comes by constantly being in the word and constantly communing with the Holy God.

Secondly, another thing for which I care is worship, that your life be a worshipping life. Psalm 96:9 says, "Worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness." And I guess as I think about worship and you'll remember the series I did some time ago, there were two aspects of worship that are important: first and foremost is worship from the heart. I care that you worship God from your heart, that when you're not here, you worship God. That when the service isn't everything you thought it ought to be, you worship God. That when you come here, you come not to get, but to give to him adoring praise, that when you hear the wonderful music like you heard tonight, you are able to follow in the words and in the beauty of the melodies a train of thought that lifts you into the presence of God. Worship from the heart, and secondly that you worship in the fellowship.

Worship from the heart is one element of it, the other element is that you worship in the corporate fellowship of God's people for He inhabits the praises of his people and as we come together collectively in a very special way we become the habitation of the spirit and there uniqueness to the corporate worship of God's people. And frankly it burdens me that for some people faithfulness at worship time on the Lord's Day seems to be a difficulty. Here whenever it's convenient, not here if it's not convenient. Here is they decide not to go somewhere else and do something else, and they lose that great sense of faithful presence with God's people that is so strengthening.

When I traveled across this country over the last two weeks I met people, I can't even number them all, who said to me basically the same thing people say to me all over this nation, "We listen to the radio or we get the tapes or we listen to other Bible teachers on the radio or we read books by men of God, but we have no place where we can go and really feel we are worshipping God." Our church is not committed to that. One young man came up to me this morning and said that he, with about seven or eight other men, has begun to meet once a week to pray for their church and the leaders of the church are threatened by such activity.

You need to realize the tremendous heritage you have here to come together with God's people faithfully on the Lord's Day as we have been commanded, not to forsake the assembling of ourselves together, and to worship God. And you need to learn the faithfulness and the discipline of that expression of corporate worship. Even when I'm not here I'll find my way on the Lord's Day into an Assembly of God's people and find myself in any assembly where he is loved and exalted completely at home with those people, though it may not be all that worship here is. And so my desire for you is that you worship from the heart and that you worship in the fellowship faithfully.

Now I know we are a part of a transient society and I know we are a part of a lot of very mobile lifestyle where people come and go and move rather whimsically about and especially in California where the roots aren't very deep and we have no loyalties to God's people and I guess it's also true that many people who have been Christians for a long time feel it's time for them to take a vacation now and then from the worship, and there are times when we can enjoy being in other places, but my desire for you is that you worship from he heart and in the fellowship.

I believe that this church ought to be filled every week by all of God's people who come with a hunger for his people, his presence, and his word.

Thirdly, another thing which expresses care in the church is the care that I have, and I know the other elders have that you fellowship, not only worship, but fellowship. I remember so visibly in my mind the picture drawn in a book I read years ago on fellowship in which a man had not been coming to church, he hadn't been attending a class, they just didn't have the time to always be faithful and the pastor went to call on them and they were sitting behind a hot fire keeping warm in the winter and

talking about the need for the man to be in church, to be fellowshipping with God's people, to be as Hebrews 10 says, "Stimulating one another to love and good works," that's why we don't forsake our assembling. And the man apparently wasn't getting the message so the pastor took the tongs that were hanging beside the fireplace, pulled the screen open, reached in with the tongs pulled out a live coal and set it on the hearth and closed the screen and in a matter of minutes, the coal had grown cold and he said to the absent parishioner, "You see what happens when you isolate yourself? This occurs in your spiritual life. You need the stimulation; you need the fire that is passed from one believer to the next. You need the accountability; you need the exercise of mutual ministry. We provide for you flocks. We provide for you fellowship groups on Sunday morning and for some reason or other there are many people who just don't feel the need for this and I guess maybe it's because again they may come expecting to get instead of expecting to give.

Some years ago in one of our staff meetings one of the staff wanted to give us a demonstration and so he had a whole lot of pieces of paper cut up in odd shapes and the idea was that we were to be able to get all of the pieces and put together a whole from the various pieces and the key to doing it was to give away your pieces and it was all prearranged except with a couple of staff people who came in and all they did was grab pieces in order to try to win and they couldn't accomplish anything. The whole thing was built around everybody giving away their pieces until the whole thing was put together and I think that illustrated to us that day how important it is that we come to give ourselves away, in a flock, fellowship group, a Bible study, a class, a prayer time, whatever it is. You need that fellowship. You need accountability. That's right you need somebody poking their nose in your life making sure it's the way it ought to be. I need that.

Whenever I take a trip I always take someone with me so that we can mutually stimulate one another to love and good works. So that we can hold one another accountable, so that we can be together, to pray together, to talk together, to minister together, to share together because that is an enriching time. We need that. Fellowship.

When I sometime look into those adult classes and I see the absentees and people who aren't there I wonder if people really understand how important it is that they fellowship and how much there are people there who need them.

A young couple came to me this morning in the visitor's line and said, "We're brand new and we're so excited about that new young married class next week. Oh, we want to go." And I thought now there's some people looking for a ministry. A young man came up to me, just a handsome young man and he was introduced to me as a first time guest this morning last Sunday night he accepted Jesus Christ as his savior. His wife had just left him and he slit his wrists. Thank God he lived. He attended the fundamentals of the faith class this morning and he's probably here tonight because he said he was going to come and he needs you and he needs me to help hold him up. And the world is full of people like that and a lot of them are right here and we need each other in fellowship.

Fourth, there is the care also that you be engaged in ministry, ministry. Early on in the life of Grace Church we talked a lot about spiritual gifts, we talked a lot about ministry, using your gifts, working for the Lord, giving to the Lord of your substance and I don't want that to change. I want you to be involved.

Another lady came through the first time visitor's line and she wasn't a first time visitor, they've been coming to the church. Young lady, she and her husband had brought a couple that was here for the first time and she had in her arm a whole pack full of children's material and I said, "You must be working with the children." She said, "Oh yes." She said, "Last week I started with the four year olds." I'd never met her, but I thanked God for her and I told her that. And all of you who have four year olds can be thankful, and the rest of us for those who work with our children too. But all of us are called to a ministry and we need to be aggressively abandoning ourselves to that which God has gifted us to do.

And I think about in terms of our giving too, this has been a very difficult year in our giving. It's been difficult economically for everybody, God has sustained us in many ways, in fact our giving now I understand is about ten percent over what it was last year, but that's the lowest percent increase we've ever had, but it's still an increase and we believe that when God provides the money we get inside the amount He provides. We don't beg for more, and so whenever I mention the idea of giving to anyone it isn't so that we can have more money to do what we want, it's so that you can understand the stewardship that God is asking of you that you might enter into his blessing.

It is difficult. We have many needs and we've cut back many, many things because while the giving has increased, it hasn't increased in proportion to the costs and so we want you to prayerfully look to that as you desire to fulfill God's willing the area of your giving.

And then lastly I care also that you be involved in evangelism. 1 Corinthians 15:58 says, "We're to be always abounding in the work of the Lord." Always for we know our labor's not in vain in the Lord and part of that is to go into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature baptizing them in the name of the Lord Jesus, making disciples out of them. Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I've commanded you. I really believe we need to be about the business of evangelism. I'm beginning, and I hope you are too, as we study Matthew to get a vision of the lost and damned people of the world on their way to hell.

When I went to the pastor's conference last week in Chicago I preached on hell to those pastors and I said in the very beginning, I said, "How long has it been since you preached a sermon on hell?" And there was a dead silence, just a hush. I think it bore a certain amount of guilt in it that men had not proclaimed that needed truth, and I'm concerned also about our baptismal services, you know they are such a marvelous time, marvelous. People come into the baptismal water and they give their

testimony and you're not here to hear it. There's a group of people always here, many of them are unsaved because they've been brought by the people being baptized, it's so important that we support these people, that we encourage them, that we show how excited and thrilled we are that God is adding to his kingdom. If you can't get excited about that, there's something wrong with you. And when these people come in our night of baptism and they declare their faith in Jesus Christ, we ought to be here to celebrate, that is the coronation, that is the glory day; that is the victory day of all victory days. And if you're not a part of that I wonder if your heart hasn't grown somewhat indifferent out of maybe reasons that you can't control, but if you can I care that you be here because I think nothing will stimulate your commitment to evangelism any more than seeing God transform other people's lives. It's a powerful thing, and we don't ever have a baptismal service when somebody doesn't get saved there. It's a great opportunity for you to bring unsaved people.

Next time we have a baptism, just covenant with the Lord you're going to bring an unsaved friend. It actually is a dynamite experience for someone who doesn't know Christ to hear testimony after testimony after testimony how God has transformed people's lives, and I think you ought to bring unsaved people all the time too. Sunday morning, Sunday night, anytime. You ought to be dragging around a whole string of them just in general so that you can bring them to the hearing of the Gospel of Christ.

The care of the church, we care for purity, we care that you worship, we care that you fellowship, we care that you serve, we care that you evangelize the lost. And I believe you care too. I really believe you do. And we all fight the same battle. Sometimes I don't do what I know I ought to do. Sometimes you don't either, but we can't make a habit out of that can we? And somewhere down the path you say, "That's enough, I'm going to change the habit pattern. I'm going to do what I ought to do. I'm going to make the kind of commitment God knows I need to make." And maybe it could begin at the Lord's Table tonight.

Let's bow together in prayer.

Our father as we come now to this your table, we are reminded again of the blessed Lord Jesus Christ who came into the world to die for us. Lord we do want to see him tonight, the crucified Christ. We want to remember what he's done on our behalf and Lord we pray too that you'll cleanse our hearts. Maybe there is impurity, maybe we haven't worshipped as we ought, maybe we haven't been faithful to fellowship and to serve and to proclaim the Gospel, forgive us. Wash our feet as you've already cleansed us when we were redeemed, wash our feet and use this time at your table to prepare our hearts. We know through the Apostle Paul you said we can't come unworthily to this table or we'll bring judgment on ourselves and so Lord we will be pure, we will be cleansed. Help us to be honest enough to name the sins that we've committed and seek forgiveness. Sins of omission and commission, sins of temper and hard heartedness, unbelief, presumption, pride, unfaithfulness, lack of zeal for the glory of Christ, bringing dishonor on His great name. Sins of deception, injustice,

untruthfulness, impurity in thought, word, and deed, covetousness. Sins of hoarding our substance, squandering our substance. Sins in private, sins in the family, sins in the quiet place, sins in the busy place. Sins in the study of the word and the neglect of it, in prayer irreverently offered and often coldly withheld. Sins in time wasted, yielding to Satan, opening the heart to his temptation. Sins that quench the spirit, sins that grieve the spirit, sins against light and knowledge, against conscience, and the restraining holy one, against the law of love. Sins unknown and known, felt and unfelt, confessed and unconfessed. Wash us from them all.

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