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Marks of an Effective Church, Part 2
Scripture: Selected Scriptures
Code: 1307

The marks of a dynamic church, or, the marks of an effective church. This is a break in our study of 1 Corinthians. The reason we're doing this is in recent days I had occasion to be at a Pastors' Conference, as I told you last time, and heard Dr. Howard Hendricks from Dallas Seminary speak. And he gave some of the things that he had found to be the common denominators of the great churches, the successful churches, the God-blessed churches, the dynamic churches that he had visited all across America. He gave some of these things, didn't particularly support them biblically, didn't have time to do that. He just gave them. But it really set me to thinking. So, I took those basic things and I pursued them and I studied them in the Scriptures and I added to them some that I felt are from my own viewpoint or my own mind out of the Word of God also, to be included in a list of the marks of a dynamic church. We came up with about 12 of them that we wanted to share with you, gave the first five last week, and will conclude with the final seven this morning.

Now, I just want to say this again by way of introduction. There are many kinds of churches large and small, many cultures in which the church local assembly that is exists. There are all different ways to minister, as different as every different individual. The Holy Spirit gives different gifts in offices and administrations. We're not saying that all churches have to be the same, or that all have to conform to the same programs, or the same patterns, or the same methods, or the same procedures. But in all of the various procedures, in all of the vast, the plethora of types and styles of churches, there are some common denominators that are true of every successful, dynamic, effective church. They may be administered in different ways, they may be realized through different avenues, but they will be there. Now, not all successful churches have all of these. All of them have some of them, and the more they have, the more dynamic they are. These, then, are the marks of a dynamic church, not only from Scripture do we see these, but from actually looking at churches and actually discerning what it is that has made them effective. Now, I'll just review the first five by naming them, and then we'll proceed on so that we can complete our study.

The first mark of a dynamic and effective church is a plurality of godly leaders. A plurality of godly leaders. The Bible teaches that there is to be in the church leadership that is godly, and that there are to be multiple of leaders. That is the heart of the church. That is the top of the church, and from there comes the direction for the church. Second thing, a dynamic church will have functional goals and objectives. That is, it knows where it's going and it has delineated the procedure to get there. It has functional goals and objectives. Thirdly, a dynamic church has a strong emphasis on discipleship. And by that, I mean making people Christians, bringing them to Christ, and then nurturing them so

that they can in turn reproduce, that the view of the strong church is a concerted effort to teach and bring people to grow and reproduce. Fourth, a dynamic church will have a strong emphasis on community penetration. The style, the program, the approach may vary, but in all successful churches, dynamic churches, there is a strong concerted effort to penetrate the community. To reach the unsaved. To make a dramatic effect upon the society in which that local assembly exists. Fifth, a church that is effective will have an aggressive, active, ministering people. It will not be a church where the paid people do everything. It will not be a spectator-type arrangement. It will be an active, aggressive, ministering body. People who know their spiritual gifts, and who use them.

All right, now let's proceed from there. Number six in our study: a dynamic and effective church will have an intense, mutually caring spirit, and there's a lot of ways you could state that. It will have an intense concern for one another. It will be involved in the lives of its people. Now, so many churches are simply places where you go to watch it happen, and we've seen this so many times in our studies. But we cannot sit in isolation. We cannot just come in, sit, and walk out the back, and say we have really been involved in what the church is doing. There is a tremendous responsibility laid at the foot of every Christian to minister to another believer, and the New Testament is absolutely loaded with this, not only in the area of ministering our spiritual gifts, but in just responding to one another.

As I was driving down here for our prayer meeting early this morning, I was listening to a radio preacher, and he was preaching and he was waxing eloquent, and he was just screaming at the top of his voice, and he was in one of those "amen" kind of congregations where you can hardly hear the preacher for all the people shouting back. And when they weren't giving it he'd say, "Now, let me hear it there brethren, let me hear it." So, they'd all holler at him. And he kept saying this, "When I was a boy, I remember when people went to church. And what we need to do is go to church. We got to get back to church." "Yeah, brother, oh yeah." All this yelling is going on, for about five minutes, he just kept saying "Go to church. Go to church." You know, I thought, "All those people are there." That's what they're doing. But what he needed to do was tell them what they're there for. All they know they're there for is to just kind of pump that guy up so he'll keep hollering at them. They hadn't the faintest idea, I'm confident, of what they were supposed to be doing. And he just kept saying, "America needs to get back to church." America never really found out what they were supposed to do when they went, so they left. Never wanted to come back, without telling them what to do when they get there.

Why do we go to church? Well, Hebrew simply says this: "Forsake not the assembling of yourselves together as the manner of some is", why? "In order that you may provoke one another to love and good works." You're not here just to listen; you're here to stimulate each other. Every one of you ought to be like a little battery, and you ought to be affecting other people. You know, the New Testament has so much information about the response of believers toward one another. It says we are to confess our sins one to another. James 5:16. In Colossians 3:13 it says we are to forgive one another. In Galatians 6:2 it says we are to bear one another's burdens. In Titus it says we are to

refute one another. In 1 Thessalonians 4:18 it says we are to comfort one another. Hebrews 10, Hebrews 4 and a lot of other places says we are to exhort one another. Romans 14:19 we are to edify one another. Romans 15:14 we are to admonish, which means to counsel with a view toward a change in behavior. James 5:16, we are to pray for one another. All of those, one another, one another, one another, over and over and over and over. We have a responsibility to each other. You haven't done it when you've managed to park your machine, walk in here, sit down, get out there without having said anything to anybody. We're not only here to hear teaching, but we're here to be sensitive to the lives of those who are about us, and this should carry through the week, through the month, through the year, through the life.

You know, I look at the life of our Lord Jesus Christ and I see somebody who was involved, with individuals, who was a caring, sensitive, loving friend. Personally integrated into peoples' lives. He brought joy to a wedding. He went to a wedding, and he brought joy. He so identified with drunkards and winebibbers who wanted to change, that men started calling him a drunkard. He met with the weak and unimportant people, and he made them eternally important. He met with perverse and hostile people and revealed a warmth that made him approachable.

I always think about the story in Mark Chapter 5. Here is Jesus, God in human flesh. He lands on the shores in the country of the Gaterines, *Gerasa*, across the Sea of Galilee. You know who came to the meeting? A mad man. And he says, "Well, what do you have to do with me, Jesus of Nazareth?" Now, this was a real far out guy who lived in the tombs, cut himself with rocks, and they tried to tie him up and he'd break the chains. The people avoided him, obviously, not too many people went out and said, "Would you like to have lunch with us at our picnic?" Well, here's Jesus, he crosses the Sea of Galilee to meet the guy, the guy comes out, they meet. I love this story. Jesus took care of him. It cost somebody a herd of pigs, but it was a small price. And finally the story closes, and it says that Jesus was there, ready to leave, and the man was sitting at Jesus' feet, clothed and in his right mind. He got involved in one man's life and transformed his life.

I always think, too, of Mark Chapter 5 when Jesus was in the crowd, and it says that the crowd was crushing him. And he turns around and says, "Who touched me?" Remember that story? And a little lady had crawled up and grabbed one of the tassels on his robe and yanked it. And he said "who touched me?" And the disciples said, "Are you kidding?" He says no, it was a special touch, and he pulled the lady out and said "come here", and he healed her. That's the kind of person he was. He was involved in the lives of people. He was totally sensitive.

There were some people getting to stone an adulteress in John 8, remember this story? Jesus walked up and started writing on the ground, and somebody said what was he writing, maybe he was writing the sins of the people who were throwing the stones. But he said to them, "Let him who is without sin cast the first stone", looked at the lady and said, "I don't condemn you. Go and sin no more." He was in the business of being sensitive to peoples' needs on an individual level, and this is

the kind of pattern he set for us. The church, people, is a loving community that we must share with one another. And I think so often we think we've satisfied ourselves that we've gone to church. We've waltzed in the building, sat down, and gotten back in the car and gone about our business. God help us if that's our perspective.

Number seven: church is not only to be mutually caring, but a church that is dynamic and effective will have a genuine, high-level devotion to the family. A genuine, high-level devotion to the family. One of the reasons here at Grace Church that we have had what we've had with family efforts is because we're so committed to the family. Dr. Barshaw, and his ministry, and the family program, which incidentally is going to have a new face, and things are going to change, and you're going to see some exciting things around here in the first of the year, his Bible study and his time each year with fathers, with dads. The effort to work in the homes, to try to stimulate godly fathers and godly mothers. The women's ministry, the genuine woman. all of the things that we try to do with seminars and teaching, to work with men, to work with women, to work with young people, is to stimulate a godliness in the family. Because we believe that God has this as a priority.

You know in recent years, the church has forgotten the family. It's sort of rejuvenated now, but if you go back ten years and try to find a book on the Christian family, there weren't any. In the last ten years, there's a zillion of them. If you go back far enough, you can remember when the family all did it together. If you go back far enough, some of you can remember when the family went together and sat in the same pew always. And you always sat together. And then, we got a program at the church, and everybody blitzed and went everywhere. Like here. You come at Grace and you go in three services, three acts, and everybody's going all over, you might run into your kid out there if you recognize them in the crush. Or maybe you might even meet your wife, I don't know. But it's a very difficult thing. It used to be that everybody went together.

And then, of course, we had counter-cultures starting to grow, and everybody wanted to be somebody so everybody found a group. And this is very necessary, because of the mask on society, there needs to be that. So, everybody's gravitated. Old people aren't old people, they're senior citizens. There's an identity there. And kids aren't just kids anymore; they're in the youth group. And the youth group has its own thing, and we gear everything to them. We have a certain thing with them. Well, you know in a lot of churches it's the youth group that's wagging the whole church. And a lot of people are sort of coming along for the ride.

Well, this happened some years back, but we could see it developing in the late '60s or even the early '60s. All the things were oriented toward the kids. Pretty soon we begin to leave the parents behind. There used to be a total balance with the family. And this is something you really have to struggle to see exists. I want to show you how important the family is to God to stress this point. Exodus Chapter 20 and 21 lays it out for us, and we'll make a couple of other stops as we go through the Scriptures and show you what I mean. Exodus 20 is the Ten Commandments, you remember this

one, verse 12: “Honor thy father and thy mother that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee.” From the very beginning, from the very beginning. Right before the command not to kill was the command to honor your father and mother. God had laid it out this way, to give respect and honor to your parents, young people, is God’s command. Chapter 21 verse 15 gives you the idea of how serious God is about it: “And he that smiteth his father or his mother shall be surely put to death.”

I’ll never forget an indelible incident in my life when I was a kid. I saw a friend of mine punch his father so hard he knocked him into the bathtub. And you know, you might hear that and think that’s funny; God doesn’t think that’s funny. He that smites his father or his mother shall be what? Surely put to death. That would have been cause for capital punishment in the Old Testament. You say, “I’d never do that, I’d never hit my father or my mother.” How about thinking evil thoughts, or how about if you wouldn’t hit them, maybe you’d curse them. Look at verse 17: “He that curses his father or his mother shall surely be,” what? “Put to death.” Execution was God’s standard.

Do you think God wanted control in the family? Do you think God wanted order in the family? Not only did he not want you to smite your parents, but he did not want you to even curse them. Not even curse them. You ever heard of any young people who have bad things to say about their folks? Worthy of death in the Old Testament. I’m only telling you this because I want you to know that God is very serious about the responsibility of the family members to one another. This is a high priority, and this is something that we must teach young people: the responsibility that belongs to them towards their parents.

Now, this is elucidated in a broader base in Proverbs 30, and I want to take a minute to show it to you because I think it’s something you can use to teach your own children to pass onto others. Now, here he’s talking about the younger generation, basically, coming along. And you’ll find as I read Proverbs 30 versus 11 and following, certain things that really ring home. It could be a description of our generation of young people today. “There is a generation that curses their father and does not bless their mother.” Would you say that’s true? Young people who curse their fathers and do not bless their mothers? In many cases their mothers and fathers don’t deserve it, but that doesn’t excuse them.

Verse 12: “There is a generation that are pure in their own eyes, yet are not washed from their filthiness.” They think that they have no need of their parents’ instruction. They’ve got all the answers. They really don’t know how bad off they are. Or verse 13: “There is a generation, oh how lofty are their eyes. Their eyelids are lifted up.” You know what that is? Conceit, pride, all the answers, hot stuff, big time, really rived. “There is a generation,” verse 14, “whose teeth are like swords, and their jaw teeth like knives to devour the poor from off the earth and the needy from among men.” This younger generation grows up and you know what happens? They take advantage of other people. They’re not honest, they’re dishonest. We see them in America. Young men, dishonest, cruel. Some of the finest young men who we saw in situations that hit our country and things like Watergate, some

of what should have been the finest of our young men whose lives were operated on this kind of principle. Taking advantage of people for their own gain.

Verse 15, here is the illustration: “The horse-leech has two daughters crying ‘give, give.’” You say, well, that’s weird; what does that mean? What’s a horse-leech? Well, you can figure out what it is by just the name of it. It’s a thing that leeches on horses. You don’t need a lexicon for that. What is it saying? A horse-leech had two teeth, or two whatever they would call them, that stab into the flesh of the horse and suck the blood out. And he says this generation is like a horse-leech. All they’re in it for is what they can get out of it. Sucking the blood out. They are never satisfied, never satisfied.

Verse 17, wow: “The eye that mocks at his father, and despises to obey his mother, the ravens in the valley shall pick it out and a young eagle shall eat it.” Now, that’s pretty strong language. That’s what God says about a child who doesn’t honor his parents, who lifts up his lofty eyes against them, the ravens will pluck it out and the eagles will eat it.

Now, when you read something like that, you get the idea that God is serious, don’t you? You know in 1 Samuel Chapter 2, remember the story of Eli the priest? Eli took care of everybody’s spiritual problems but never took care of his own kids. This is one of the great disasters in the Ministry. Pastors who don’t take care of their kids, don’t take care of their families. Too busy doing this and that. Dr. Hendricks shared a story and he said that some guy called him up and said, “Dr. Hendricks, we’re having a big Bible conference, we want you to be our speaker. Can you come?” He said, “No, I can’t come.” The guy says, “Why can’t you come? This is a crucial thing for our city, for our town, for our community. Why can’t you come? Do you have another appointment?” He says, “No, I got to play with my kids.” He said, “You got to play with your kids? Don’t you realize that our people need teachings?” He said, “Yeah, well, my kids need me.”

He was right, you know that? Because if he ever lost his kids, then all the credibility of his ministry is gone, plus his heart is broken. So, sometimes if I don’t come, it’s because I’m playing with my kids. Is that wrong? That’s not wrong. I don’t want to be like Eli. You know what Eli did? He didn’t play with his kids. You know what grew up? Two really bad kids, Hophni and Phinehas. They didn’t have a good start with those names, but you know, they could have done a lot better for them. But they turned out to be bad. And you know what God said to Eli? He says you know Eli, when I first chose Aaron, and I first started this whole Priesthood thing and the chain in which you’re in, when I started that thing, I told those priests they’d be priests forever. And that this would be the line. But you know, your sons have so violated my law, that I’m going to call a halt right here. And you’re two boys Hophni and Phinehas are going to die on the same day. Do you think Eli’s heart wasn’t broken? Too busy ministering, taking care of everybody else, couldn’t take care of his sons.

I’ll never forget a story that a guy told me, he was an evangelist. He said that he overheard his kid talking; this little boy was talking to the neighbor boy. He was always gone on evangelistic meetings,

and his boy wanted to do something with the neighbor. He said, “I can’t do anything with you ‘cause I got to go with my dad, my dad and I are going to go down to the park and play.” And this evangelist’s son said, “Oh. My dad can’t play with me; he’s too busy playing with other people’s children.” He said nothing ever affected him as much as that did. Listen, we have an obligation to our families. That’s a high priority. there’s a high price to pay if you lose out. So, you know, we’re concerned about that. We want solid marriages, right? Solid homes. So, we have a family ministry. We just began a few months ago, because of this commitment, a premarital course. Anybody that wants to be married at Grace Church, anybody, must have a five week course that involves study, homework, projects, assignments, tapes to listen to, all kinds of things to do. They’re assigned to a contact couple, that is a married couple in the Church that has a great relationship, a good solid couple, and they are to just work individually with those people before they ever come to the place of marriage.

Somebody said when we first started that, “Why do you make people go through all that?” Because we know what it’s like to sit in the offices week after week after week and pick up the pieces of the marriages that never got started right.

There must be this kind of commitment to the family, and there is, in every church, really, that is going to be dynamic. I mean it’s clear, isn’t it, that husbands that love their wives, wives committed to their husbands, children obey their parents, and parents you don’t have to provoke your children to wrath, but you’re to admonish them and nurture them. It’s all there, and it has to be made clear.

Alright, number eight. Got to keep going. Boy, you can really fire away on these. Number eight. A dynamic church will also have a strong Bible teaching preaching ministry. I really believe that dynamic churches are churches where there are solid teaching and preaching at the heart of it. I don’t think you can make up for an anemic pulpit. I really don’t. I don’t think Sermonettes for Christianettes cut it. I don’t think platitudes and stories and all that make, I think there has to be in a great church, the heartbeat of the church is a dynamic presentation of the truth of God.

I think about Dr. Criswell when he went to Dallas First Baptist Church. He’s only the second pastor in its history, they’ve only had two. George Truett and Criswell, two great men. And when he got there he said to the Board, he said, “You know what I’m going to do? I’m going to teach through the Bible. I’m going to start in Genesis and I’m just going to go verse by verse until we finish the entire Bible.” They said, “You’ll empty the place, you can’t do that.” He did it. Didn’t empty it. it’s the biggest church in America. 15,000 members. You know why they go there? Because there’s somebody there who teaches them the Word of God and does it in a way that they can respond to, and change their lives. There’s no substitute for that.

There must be at the heart of the church the beating pulse of the solid pulpit that teaches and preaches the Word of God. You know, that’s our rallying point. Let’s face it, you arrive in the morning, get out of your car and split, and everybody goes a different direction. But the one common

denominator we have is here, isn't it? And this is really the pulse that carries the church. If we never had this, and there was a series of articles suggesting some years back that we shouldn't have it, we wouldn't have that common growth together. I'll never forget reading those articles, a series of them.

And the suggestion was that we don't have churches anymore like we have them today. We get rid of buildings, and we don't have to do all of that. And every family would be a unit, and the father would be the priest. That's ideal. The only problem is: you still got to have this because a lot of fathers aren't doing it. And if somebody doesn't teach the wives and kids, they won't. Right? But, every family with a father. And then, you take five families, you'd have the five family group, and one of those fathers would teach that group. And you'd have all these little deals going everywhere. You wouldn't need to come here at all, except maybe once a month you could rent a hall somewhere in town and compare notes.

I thought that would be good, initially. And I had a positive reaction to the idea of breaking it down. I had a negative reaction to the absence of preaching. So, you're saying of course you would. Well, I would, that's right. but I'm not just defending what I do because I do it, I'm defending what I do because it's right to do it. I didn't hear any amens. We didn't come here just to give him the offering.

You see, you go through the book of Acts, you go through the life of Christ, and preaching dominates those things. You can't cut it out; you can't eliminate what God uses. The preaching of the cross is still to them that perish foolishness, but to them that believe, it is salvation. And it is still the proclamation, the *krugma*, the dedicating instruction that changes men's lives.

And this is important, but preaching can be so many things. Let me just go a step further with it. I believe that there must be, and there is, in churches that are really doing something, a great driving, motivating pulpit that is also instructing and teaching. You hear so much about how to preach, but of course I hear a lot more than you do because I move a bit in those circles. But, one way that you hear today is that the preacher is supposed to make everybody feel good. I mean after all, the guy has an unhappy life, right? He works hard and the boss is cruel, he's henpecked on top of that when he goes home, his kids are delinquent, he can't make the payment on the car, and all of this kind of stuff, and he comes to church, make the guy feel good. You know, don't smash him from pillar to post. He's been already all week. And so, you come to church, and that's the idea of positive thinking, you're all wonderful and everything is rosy. I turned on the television last night because I sometimes like to watch other Christian programs, and so I turned this one on, and this was the guy who came on. And he was smiling, and he had sort of a family-type thing and he said, "Every day with Jesus is so happy. I have, oh, if you could only be so happy as I am." Every day with Jesus is so happy. You know what I said? Garbage.

Now, you tell that to the wife whose just gotten back from the cemetery where she buried her husband. Tell her that Christianity's a slap-happy kind of thing. You tell the mother whose little child

was just diagnosed as having terminal leukemia, that every day is a happy day. Don't kid me. Every day is fulfilling, but every day there is an abiding joy in the presence of Christ, but this isn't any slap-happy kind of life. And if all we're supposed to do is come together and tell each other how wonderful we are, we're all lying. 'Cause somebody else says, "No, that isn't the thing to do, the thing you want to do is help him solve his problems." Well, we live in a world that is so psychologically overridden that we can hardly think about getting into clinical analysis. We can't take anything objectively hardly without analyzing it. So, what we're supposed to do is solve problems, you know, and there's so much of what I call "problem-centered preaching", have you heard it? The guy states the problem and gives ten verses out of context on how to solve it. Get a few stories about some people who solved it.

I'm not a glorified psychoanalyst, and I'm not a great grandfather Santa Claus type who's going to pat you on the head and tell you everything's happy. A preacher's task is to not only educate you in the Word of God, but it is to make you change your behavior to conform to it, right? And I'll tell you something very honestly. I hope you feel worse before you feel better, right? There's got to be healing before there can be restoration. So, when somebody comes to me after the service and says, "Oh, that was so wonderful, I just loved that." I say, I didn't get across. Somebody comes to me and says, "You know that really convicted me. Boy, that really made me search my heart." And I say, "Well, the message came through."

Now, I don't want you all to come up to me and be dishonest, you know. Other people say, well, the church is supposed to be used to help people to make decisions about social life and all, no, no. We're here to teach you the Word of God and we're here to call what is sin, sin in order that you might change your behavior. Just pacifying your problems doesn't make you feel good. You know what makes you feel good? Confessing, repenting and changing your life. Right? Then, you feel good. Then, real joy occurs.

Number nine. And this I'm going to mention with some strength. Number nine: a church that is dynamic will have a willingness to change and innovate. A willingness to change and innovate. All of you that have come from other churches than this one have come into a different kind of structure here. It's not like the one you came from. Some of you came from Baptist churches, some of you, like the hymn said about our Lord, Jesus the Nazarene came from Nazarene churches, some of you have come from Presbyterian, some of you from Lutheran, some of you from Catholic churches, some of you probably come out of things like Mormonism and Jehovah's Witnesses and whatever else, and all of you various and sundry kind of formats and forms. Some of you come from Bible-pumping pounding-type super-duper fundamentalist backgrounds, and all kinds of things, you put together all the pieces of all these puzzles. You come here and everything is different.

And for some people, it's a little bit different. Somebody told me the other day that they enjoyed coming to our church, but they felt more of a worshipful spirit in a different kind of structure. And I understand that, and everyone is different. But let me say this: forms are not sacred, okay? There is

nothing sacred about forms. Alan Hendricks said we must distinguish between the unchangeable and what must be changed.

And let me add another thought. There is no faith without risk. And one of the things that an aggressive church has to be doing is always bursting out of old forms, okay? You know, whenever we would say we're going to go to three services, or we're going to go to three Acts classes, or we're going to change the whole concept of Sunday School to Acts. We always have a meeting, and we always say boy, we're going to get some negative reaction on this. Why? Because people don't like change. You know why? Because change is insecurity. But you want to know something, faith demands risk. Doesn't it? There is no faith without risk. Church can become so comfortable that you just plop, and then there's nothing there. But if it's always changing and you're always living on the precipice of change, then you're going to stay on top of things. That's one reason we don't give you an order of worship in the morning that tells you everything that's going to happen. We don't want you to know everything that's going to happen. There's got to be some adventure.

We used to go to camp, the camp directors used to put a program in the kids' hands, tell them what all the meetings and everything were, you know what they do? They go through the program and figure out ahead of time what they won't like. So, now they don't give a program, they don't know, they got to come to find out what's happening. That's what we do here. We want you to be part of it. We want you to flow with the thing. Forms aren't sacred, and busting out of old forms is risk, but that's faith. I figure change for the sake of change. 'Cause if you don't change, then people get in ruts and they don't know what's really going on.

The apostle Paul adapted, it was beautiful. You know, there wasn't always the format that we have today. The apostle Paul, you know what he taught every day from one to five, five, six, seven days a week? You say, "I couldn't handle that, I could barely get through one service." You know, you can go some places in Africa where they meet together at daybreak and they go back home when the sun goes down? They do it every day on the Lord's Day and they're preaching together. I've preached in black churches in the South where I would finish one sermon and they'd say, "Brother, preach another one." I'd just turn the page in my notebook and take off again in another passage. I'd preach that one, and I have preached as many as three and four sermons in a row. And you know, mine aren't real short. And they'd just say, "Give some more to us, Brother." But the other side of the coin is we sit there and we got that 12:00-itis, you know? It's 12:00, what's going on? Isn't God through yet? You know, there are some people who would collapse if there was no Sunday morning worship. If we said, "Look, we can't make it on Sunday mornings anymore, we got a gas war, we got problems, whatever's going to happen, we're going to have to change the thing or we're going to have to meet in different places around the city on Tuesday evening, and that's going to be our," Oh, man, my heart. I don't know if I can take it. But every day is sacred for the believer, isn't it? Every day. Sure we love to be together on this day, and our society allows us to be together.

Another thing I think we do is we worship at the shrine of the building. We have a structural pope. This is sort of the thing where church is here, and we identify the institution. What we've done is we've canonized the form, and then we struggle to make it relevant. We live with incidental patterns, and we make them into institutions. And this isn't anything new. We all retreat from the world and we get in the building, and we're in the building, and that's secure and safe and nice. And you know, I bet you've thought about it, I know I have, have you ever thought of what it would be like, or have you ever thought the fact that somebody might come in and interrupt us? Do you ever think about that? I've thought about that a lot. What would happen if somebody busted in and just started interrupting us? "What's he doing in our building? This is our building." We've had that happen, several times. One time on Easter Sunday a lady was crawling down the aisle trying to get up here, and somebody took her away just before she got here. But another time after I was finished preaching, there was somebody who may have been here, a man came running and stood right beside me and says, "I have something to say, I have something to say." Just after I said amen in the prayer. And what are you going to do? So I just stepped aside and said okay. And they turned the microphone off, but at least the first 15 rows heard what he had to say.

But you know, it's amazing how threatened we are. I'm threatened too, you know. I think about that. I mean, we've got our little secure box that we identify our whole Christianity with this little box we live in. Listen, buildings are a sign that people want identification and that's good. Buildings are a sign that people want roots and form and they want routine, because it's non-threatening. But bricks aren't sacred, and the order of worship is not inspired, and there must be change or we stagnate. If there's warmth here, if there's joy here, if there's teaching here, it isn't because of the form, it's because God is here, and the Spirit is at work, and he's busy not just on Sunday morning here, but everywhere in the lives of his people. It's the spirit of the people. God doesn't work in buildings, he works in hearts.

Let me give you three points just to think about. Whenever you're going to preserve change, and that's a strange term, but I like to use that, we must preserve change. And if you're going to preserve change, you have to remember three things. Number one, Spirit takes precedent over structure. Spirit takes precedent over structure. What you are really is more important than what this building is doing. What's going on in your life outside of here is more important than what's going on here. This is not God's house, you are. In fact, in Second Corinthians 6:16, Wuest says in his translation, "As for us, we are an inner sanctuary of the living God. And what he's doing in us is more important than what he's doing in this building." He's only doing it here when we're here. You'd be surprised. When I walk over during the week and look in this building, nothing is going on. There's nothing happening here at all. You know why? The Lord isn't there. Not until I walk in.

Secondly, not only does Spirit take precedent over structure but we must be open to the Holy Spirit. If the Holy Spirit is doing things and changing things, than we're ready to change.

Thirdly, procedure must follow needs. To remain spiritually alive, we've got to flow with the needs. If the society changes and the culture changes, then the church is going to have to come in a way that it can minister effectively. And you got to get rid of the attitude, "we've never done it that way before." That's a good reason to do it.

Let me give you an illustration of how you can confuse what is a form with what is a truth. And some people don't know the difference. For some people, all church is, is forms. So, they can't discern between a form and the truth. Look at Matthew 15, there's a perfect illustration. Matthew 15:1: "Then, came to Jesus scribes and pharoses of Jerusalem saying." They were always trying to argue about what Jesus and his disciples were doing, trying to trap them. And they had made a lot of rules. The Bible has the laws of God, but the Rabbis made traditions. And they were not binding on God's eyes, they were not inspired of God, they were just plain old egoistic rules so people who kept them could exalt themselves. And one of the rules was that before you ever ate, you had to wash. Now, it's obvious that you have to wash for cleanliness, but this was beyond that. They had to go through ceremonial procedure, sort of purifying themselves and making themselves holy, and then they could eat. It was a whole bunch of religious gobbledygook. The disciples of Jesus didn't do that, verse 2. So, the Pharisees and scribes said, "Why do your disciples transgress the tradition of the Elders?" You're breaking tradition. You're doing it different. A few weeks ago we had the music at the end of the services, and somebody said, "Why do we have the music at the end of the service?" I said, "Because a lot of times we have it at the beginning, we thought we'd do it different." "I like it better at the beginning." "Why?" "Because we've always done it at the beginning."

In other words, this is tradition. Tradition we make into some kind of divine fiat. Why do your disciples transgress the tradition of the Elders? They're not washing their hands when they're eating bread. Didn't mean they had dirty hands, it meant they didn't go through the ceremony. Jesus says, "Oh, why do you transgress the commandment of God?" You want to know why these guys don't obey your commands; why don't you obey God's? For illustration, God has commanded that you honor you father and mother. And if you curse your father and mother, you're going to die. Now, that means you're supposed to take care of your parents. But instead of that, when you should be giving the money to your needy parents, you say to your father or your mother, "I'm sorry folks, it's a gift." In other words, I'd love to give you this money, but I've already consecrated it to God, so I must give it to him. I'm sorry, I'd like to give it to you, but I've consecrated it to God. That's what they were doing. What piosity. They were absolutely in contradiction to the law of God about honoring parents. While they were giving these little gifts that they were consecrating which was a tradition they had developed. In obedience to their stupid tradition, they were violating the law of God to give to the needs of their parents. Yeah well, my disciples may be breaking your tradition; you're breaking God's laws.

“You hypocrites”, verse 7 says. Now, watch verse 9. “They are worshipping me in vain. They teach for doctrines the commandments of,” what? “Of men.” You see, they didn’t know the difference between what is a tradition and what is divine command. And I think the church has long ago muddied the waters in that area. As I say, I don’t think that most people even know the difference between what God instituted and what the church instituted. If you go to mess around with the traditions, they think that you’re messing around with the divine truth.

Alright, number ten. Another thing that is characteristic of a dynamic and effective church is a constant effort to stretch the people’s faith. Great churches, dynamic churches, are living out there on the precepts of faith. They’re living out there on the edge where they got to believe God. And there’s no faith in that risk. You think about, just an illustration, Moses. Moses said to the children of Israel, “We’re leaving Egypt. Everybody, come on, let’s get together.” They all get out of there. They come to the Red Sea. “Moses, what do we do now? Pharaoh’s army is coming up the back, the Red Sea is there.” “Watch.” with a stick, the Red Sea parts. All right? “Moses, how do we know we don’t get in the middle? And, it all comes down. Trust God. Trust God. Okay? Phew, that was a scary ordeal, going through this. They get to the other side, drown Pharaoh’s armies. “Well, Moses, now that we’re on the other side, we can’t get back, we haven’t got anywhere to go, what are we going to do?” “We’re going to wander around in this desert over here.” “Well, Moses, how are we going to eat?” “Well, God is going to drop stuff out of Heaven.” “Oh.” Come on.

“Now, that we’ve crossed the Jordan and we’re on the edge of this Jericho place, how are we going to conquer it?” “We’re going to blow horns and all the walls will fall down.” “Oh, that’s terrific.” There is no such thing as living the life that God asked you to live without risk, do you understand that? Faith is all about risk. Well, you know what happens with Christians? Man do they dislike anything that is risky. There is no such thing as faith without risk. In Ephesians 3 it says that God is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all, we can ask or think according to the power that works in us if we’ll just believe him for it. In Hebrews Chapter 11 you have all those heroes of faith, remember that? They believed God and man, Daniel believed God and where did he go? Right in that lion’s den. And on, and on, and on, and on, that 11th chapter of Hebrews. Abraham believed God when there was no way that Sarah could have a baby. But he believed God. Faith, stretching faith, you know, Christianity is not a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush. Christianity is not, “Well, I’ve got it and I’m hanging on. That’s as far as I’m going.”

That’s what happens to so many churches where you have excited people who want to move out for God, and you’ve got a group of men who hold the purse strings. And they create a bottleneck at a lower level. You got all kinds of great plans, “No, I’m sorry, we don’t have the money to do that.” “Well, wait a minute; is that what God wants done?” “Well, yes, but we don’t have the money.” God never had a problem getting money for what he wants done. And that’s exciting to see how that can work.

Number 11: a church that is dynamic and effective will have a spirit of sacrifice. That comes right off of ten. You know backing up to ten for a second, when I think about building that new building, I think about the fact that we're saying, "we're going to build this building, we're going to believe God for it, we're going to raise the money", we've really stepped out on faith, haven't we? I mean, all this permit hang-up and what we got as of today, at least $450,000.00 in that fund. That's just a half a million dollars. We figured we need $700,000.00 to build it, to get it going. Here we got all that money; we don't even know if we can build a building. Isn't that exciting? We're just believing God. Let me ask you a question. What are you believing God for in your life that nobody else could do so that when he does it, you know that he did it? Anything? What are you believing God for in this church that only God could do, so that when he does it, he gets the glory? Boy, that's exciting, that's faith. That's the way we got to live.

Alright, let's go to that next one. A spirit of sacrifice. A really effective church doesn't have to plead for people to be involved or to give. They are. A dynamic church has a sacrificial mentality. It shouldn't have the need for gimmicks, and tricks, and drives, and artificial means of stimulating them to do what they ought to do. There is a spirit of sacrifice in giving. Like the Macedonians, their heart was right, and they just pour out their love. Like the Philippians, Paul says, "I don't need this much, what are you giving me this much for?" He didn't have to ask them for anything. "Your love has super abounded to me", he says. And that's the way it's been in this church. It's never that we don't have enough; it's always that we have more. And do we ever ask, do we ever plead, do we ever force, do we ever canvas you, do we ever have professional people come knock on your door and tell you how to get it? We don't do that, because we believe that in a church that is really dynamic for God, there will be a spirit of sacrifice and it'll manifest itself in giving of time, talent and money.

12, Dynamic church will have a primary thrust on worshipping God. It will have a primary thrust on worshipping God. Now this, I think, is the ultimate thing that really makes a church great. Now, many churches that are large and successful don't yet know the fullness of this point. Maybe it isn't as common as the others, but boy it's important. What do I mean by that? You know, there are a lot of things that a church can get stuck on. They're all good things. A church can get stuck on, for example, its programs. So, that the goal of everything becomes the program. "We've got to get the program across. We've got to work the program."

So, you know what happens? Anything goes if you get the program done. Well, you know what happens? You have no real basis of integrity there. And so, you may compromise to accomplish the end. Their whole orientation is around their theology, "We are the ones who believe like this; everyone else is the one who believes like that. And so, we glorify our theology, our position." It's all in their title usually. They're the first sovereign freewill pre-millennial, pre-tribulation, anti-liberal, pro-conservative, uncompromising church of Hope Street. It's the magnification of the theology. Well, I agree with the theology, but there's more to the thrust of the church than its theology.

And then, you know, there are some churches that are just glorifying their uniqueness, you know? They become a character of themselves. There are other churches, even getting in a more serious vein, there are other churches that get stuck on the person of Christ. They're just like a record, they're stuck there. I'm not against the person of Christ, believe me, obviously. But there are some churches that never get past that; all they ever talk about is Jesus. You need to get saved and know Jesus, and then you need to tell people about Jesus. It's always Christ, Christ, Christ, Christ. And there are other churches, and it's always the Holy Spirit, right? Holy Spirit this, Holy Spirit that, the Holy Spirit this, the Holy Spirit that, and the Holy Spirit came down, the Holy Spirit and we did this, and they're all, you know, this is the whole charismatic thing. But you know, the solid thrust of a church is to be a preoccupation with not one member of the Trinity or two members, but the total Trinity. It is to be a church that is worshipping God in his fullness.

And listen, when you're total thrust is set on God, and you're doing everything to honor God, then you have a base for an uncompromising integrity. Because it doesn't matter what makes the program go, it doesn't matter what your church is unique in, it doesn't matter what your so-called theology is. What matters is: what does God require? And at that base, you set your integrity. Now, that's what makes a church really great. I hope those things will be a basis not only for this church, but for many churches. That God may be honored. Let's pray.

Thank you Father, for our fellowship in Christ, for the blessedness of this hour, for the joy that we've shared. We give you the praise for building your church, and may we be a part of seeing you build it your way. In Jesus' name, amen.

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