

How to Destroy Grace Church, Part 3

Selected Scriptures

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We've been departing from our study of Matthew and Daniel for just the last couple of Sundays because my heart has been deeply concerned to share with you a special message. And we're continuing that message this morning and again tonight trusting that God will resensitize us to some primary areas of commitment and concern in our church. This is not a static church. This is not a church that holds a certain pattern. This church grows so fast and changes so fast that it's very difficult to keep up. And so we are constantly challenged to reaffirm the basics.

A couple of Sunday nights ago I asked those who had been with Grace Church for less than a year to raise their hand and I think it was over half the congregation. God has really given us tremendous growth. The early service is as filled nearly as this one and many, many new people. And as we grow and even those who have been here for a long time, we tend to fall into certain patterns. And as I shared with you last time, it's very easy for us to go to the lowest tolerable level and to get away with as much as we can. And so we constantly need to reaffirming and the reasserting of the standard that we are to live by.

There are reasons, I believe, that God has blessed Grace Church. Those reasons are not human. But I believe they are biblical reasons why God has blessed this church. And as I shared with you last Sunday, I believe the absence of those same biblical reasons will be the death of this church. We live in a precarious day, don't we? Getting more precarious all the time. We were very concerned because economically we could see pressures coming to bear and people were discussing..."Well, what's going to happen to the church? The economy is getting very inflated. People can't purchase fuel for their transportation. They won't be able to come to church. We're going to really suffer as a church because of economic pressure." And then the pressure was even made greater when we began to have problems in Iran that have continued and continued and OPEC nations have raised the price of oil by the barrel and we are continually be inundated with economic tension.

And then people became concerned because there was an encroaching governmental move toward taking away some of our religious freedoms. And people were concerned that the IRS or the Attorney General of this state or the Federal Government or the Supreme Court or some other court was going to take away our freedom. And the church was being threatened by...by the encroachment of an atheistic humanistic political philosophy.

And then recently we see the great foot of Russia driving itself into the nation of Afghanistan and taking another giant step in the world that it desires to conquer. We know about Russia's power expressed in Africa and South America and Eastern Europe and now in the Middle East. And we can see the movement of this giant atheistic communistic threat. For the first time in my life time, America is no longer at a standoff with Russia because we are out armed in a monstrous way by Russia. Whatever cold war may exist, it's certainly not because we are a threat to them. Recently a military

man said that Russia could wipe us out with its arsenal, totally obliterating the United States of America. And the best we could do would be to get 14 million of them and they kill nearly that many in the Ukraine themselves so they wouldn't think them unexpendable to gain their ends. The man went on to say that he thought by 1982 it's possible that in America either we don't exist or we're trading in Russian rubles.

And so we see these tremendous pressures. What would ever happen to the church of Jesus Christ in America if a war came to pass, or if things changed dramatically as to who rules this country? And so we have become very preoccupied with these external threats on the church. And Satan is ever so subtle. Wouldn't he love to get us preoccupied with that while we miss the thing which really alone can devastate the church, and that is the corruption of the church from the inside. All of the external pressures cannot alter the work of God in the hearts of His people when they are committed to the biblical truth. They may drive it underground. They may scatter it as in the early chapters in the book of Acts, but it will go everywhere proclaiming Christ. It will do what it has to do to exist and in the process be purged and purified.

No, friends, the enemy is us. The greatest threat that faces the church of Jesus Christ in the world today is the loss of integrity, is the loss of commitment to biblical truth, is a loss of holding on tenaciously with a death-grip to those things we know to be inexorably and eternally true as revealed in the Word of God for the life of the church. And so, with that in mind I went back to my notes from four and a half years ago to go over a dozen or so principles that I presented to you as a church then. And I said after my study and consultation with other men of God, I believe these to be the marks of an effective church. I believe these to be the biblical sine qua nons, these to be the absolutes that we must go toward. These are to be the direction, if not the perfection of our church. These are to be the things that we must be committed to if this is to be what God wants it to be. And I told you at the time, if we took a stand on these issues there would be a price to pay, there would be a certain amount of unpopularity with the world. God, help us if they love us too much. There was to be a certain cost factor in our own lives. But these were the things, I believe, the Bible taught. And so we shared with you those dozen or so things called the marks of an effective church.

A couple of weeks ago as I was wrestling with some major things in my own heart, as I was struggling with some issues that I saw confronting Grace Church, as I was grappling in prayer with the Lord about these matters, my attention was drawn to the fact that interestingly enough I saw that where Satan was hitting us was at these very specific points. We had defined our goals biblically. We had proclaimed them and we were moving in that direction. And it was precisely in those areas that Satan was attacking us.

This may sound shocking to you but the majority of you weren't here four and a half years ago so you don't know what those were. The rest of us who were here have forgotten, unless we just listened to the tape. And so as I saw Satan attacking us in these very same areas, it was impressed upon my heart that I should reiterate these to you only this time from a negative viewpoint, not a positive...not "this is what we must do" but "this is what we must protect" because this is what is being attacked.

You know, the great fear of my heart would be that some day this place would be an empty place. Some day there wouldn't be a church here. I don't know what there would be, maybe the city's largest roller rink...I don't know. My great fear that it would all kind of dead-end somewhere because we failed to be vigilant, as Peter says, to note that our adversary goes about like a roaring lion,

seeking who he may devour. We fail to watch with an alertness that Peter talks about. And our Lord as well. And so we need to guard the area. We cannot be like the troops huddled in the middle of the fort with nobody on the wall so that the first we know of the enemy is when he bursts through the gates and already we are defeated. But we have to post our sentinels, we have to have a watchman on the wall to tell us of the approaching danger.

And I believe as the servant of the Lord in this place that God has called me according to Acts 20 to watch and warn the flock, knowing full well that grievous wolves shall enter in not sparing the flock and of your own selves shall men arise teaching perverse things to draw away disciples unto themselves, we must alert ourselves to the place where Satan attacks us. We have to defend ourselves.

I believe Grace Church can be destroyed but I don't think it will happen in international politics. I don't think it will happen on a national, political level. I don't think it will happen on a state political level. I don't think that we can be destroyed by any external power. The thing that's going to get to us if anything does is the erosion of our own commitment. Oh, we may have to change the face of the way we operate, but that isn't the destruction of the church.

Now what do we need to protect then? What is Satan after? Last Lord's day we discussed the first three things and today we'll discuss, this morning, the second three and tonight I want to finish. But last time I told you that if we are to be destroyed, it will be when we abandon a plurality of godly leaders, a plurality of godly leaders. That, my friends, is absolutely necessary.

Secondly, we shared last Sunday evening that Satan will destroy us when we are seeing the erosion of a high standard of holiness...a high standard of holiness. And that was the major thrust of the message last week and I know God worked because our prayer room was so filled that the counselors had to ask people to come back, they couldn't even deal with them. The world is undermining God's holy standards, God's high standard of righteousness and purity as being set aside for a lesser standard even in the church. And when that happens, the church sets about its own self-destruction.

The third thing I shared with you last Lord's day was the church can be destroyed if we abandon our proper spiritual goals and objectives. And I mean by that, that it's so easy when a church is large and when a church has all kinds of resources and facilities and ministries to begin to get smug and self-sufficient and content with the status-quo, and to find a little comfortable group and to get settled into that little group. And all of a sudden you forget that the task is yet undone. Don't ever equate the current status with success of the divine mission, that will never be done until Christ comes. And so we talked about the church as a living organism...ever, ever, ever growing, ever ministering, ever asserting again its objectives and goals and moving toward those goals.

Now for this morning I want to bring you to a fourth principle. I believe that Satan can destroy this church if we abandon our strong emphasis on discipleship...on discipleship. And I see Satan attacking us in that way. More and more people are content to come to Grace Church and just sit. I talked to a person last week, I said to he and his wife, "What church do you go to?"

"We go to Grace Church."

"Well, I've never seen you there."

"Well we only come now and then."

"Oh, you mean, you don't come regularly?"

"No, we just...we come now and then. We like it a lot it's just that we're very busy."

I said, "Well, if you're too busy for the assembling of yourselves together, too busy to be stimulated to love and good works, then you are too busy."

And there are people who come all the time but they have no comprehension of the process that they are to be involved in, the process of re-production. You see, one of the elements of life is that life reproduces, doesn't it? Life has a capacity to reproduce. And it is a denial of the very essence of life to be non-productive and non-reproductive. And yet the church is literally filled with people who just don't reproduce.

In college I ran on the track team when they got desperate. And they used to make me run the mile relay, one of the legs of the mile relay and I learned what it was to depend upon somebody to run a good lap and hand me a baton and then I'd run a lap and hand it to somebody else and he'd run a lap and hand it to somebody else and maybe we'd win. But I knew that we depended on each other. There was a dependency on my back, a responsibility when somebody gave me that baton and I was running not just for me but for them and for a school. Somebody invested a lot of training in running a good first leg and depended on me to run a good second leg. And I think the same is true spiritually. Paul says to Timothy, "Timothy, be strong," 2 Timothy 2:1, "in the grace that is in Christ Jesus."

Why is he telling him that? Because Timothy had grown weak. Paul said to him, "God has not given us the spirit of fear or timidity. Timothy, why are you faltering? Timothy, stir up the gift of God that is in thee, committed to thee by the laying on of the hands of the presbytery. Timothy, be thou an example of the believer. Timothy, be nourished up in the words of sound doctrine. Timothy, don't let those Ephesian errorists hassle you. Timothy, don't be intimidated because you're young. Let no man despise your youth. And, Timothy, of all things don't be sick over this, take a little wine for your stomach's sake, get your act together." And then he goes on to say this, "And the things you heard from me among many witnesses, the same commit to faithful men who shall be able to teach others also."

Timothy, he says, you don't have the luxury of quitting. The thing you heard from me give to faithful men who shall be able to teach others also...that's four generations, Paul to Timothy to faithful men to others also. You don't have the right to quit, too much is invested in you.

I'm a fifth generation preacher. A lot is invested in me. I remember when my grandfather was dying in 1950, saved late in his life, felt the call of God, his family was a railroading family in Prince Edward Island up in Canada and he felt the call of God from where he lived in Canada. And so he came to the Bible Institute of Los Angeles to prepare for the ministry. He started boys' clubs all over the city of Los Angeles. He was a part of the founding of many Christian movements, pastored many churches, the last of his days at the Eagle Rock Baptist Church. My grandfather preached the Word of God as

best he could in the years of his life. And I remember when he was dying on his death bed in 1950, dying of cancer, he asked my father who was beside his bed, I was just a boy of 11 at the time and he asked my father, he said, "Would you pray, Jack, that I could just preach one more time?" He invested all that he had into his son, my Dad, and my Dad invested all that he had into me. And, people, there's been too much at stake in my life for me to quit, you see? Too much invested. And then there were some dear and godly men in my days of college and seminary and people who touched my life who poured into me the best of what they had. So much is invested in me that I have to pass it on to somebody else, I have two sons and two daughters and they deserve the legacy that some have given to me. And I have a flock and they deserve the best of what has been committed to me. Too much invested. Too many hours of reading books, too many great men who are long gone who put their thoughts on paper, who have poured those thoughts through that paper into my life to quit now. And let me tell you something, too much is invested in you, too. You cannot become a spiritual cul de sac, you cannot be a stagnant pond. You don't have that luxury.

And if ever Grace Church is content to just sit and hear, we have reached a state of apathy that is one of the signs of death. And you can still be kicking and be dying. I remember as a boy chopping the head of a chicken off and seeing a good illustration of that. There may be movement but there's no life there. And so, people, I call you again to the reaffirmation of the fact that this church has always been committed to the process of discipleship. And by discipleship I do not mean friendship. Friendship is a whole other category. But some people think friendship is discipleship. "Well, I'm discipling So-and-so."

"Well how long have you been doing it?"

"Oh, we've been friends for 27 years."

Listen if you couldn't accomplish it long ago, you better give up. That's different. Discipling somebody is basically a term assignment, it has a beginning and an end and you move on. You don't have the luxury to just pile up non-redeeming fruitless relationships that have built in them diminishing returns. Friendships are one thing, discipleship is something else.

Let me take you for a moment to a very important Scripture in Ephesians chapter 4 which has set a standard for us here. And I want to talk about it for a moment. And then to one other Scripture in this regard. But in Ephesians 4 we find the objective of the church. In verse 11 it says that the Lord gave some apostles, and some prophets...and I believe there was a chronological element there, they were for a certain time. And then He gave some evangelists, those are church planters, those who go where Christ is not named and reach those who have not yet named Christ. And some teaching shepherds.

Now why did the Lord give to the church evangelists and teaching shepherds? What was His purpose? Verse 12, "For the perfecting, or the maturing, of the saints." Stop right there.

The objective in the church is the maturing of the saints. The objective is not to get a crowd, the objective is not to have a lot of people there. The objective is not to entertain, to make them feel well, the objective is not to tickle their spiritual fancy or preach sermonettes for Christianettes. The objective the church is the perfecting of the saints. It is to bring them to maturity, to fulfillment, to fullness.

Now just how mature are we to be? Well if you go down to verse 13 you find out, the end of the verse, "We are to come unto a perfect man, mature man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ." The objective in the church, now listen, is to bring people to the fullness of Christ's likeness, that's our goal. You do not accomplish your purpose until you have come to be like Christ.

And what is the agency for doing that? What is the tool to do that? What do we use to perfect the saints? It's very clear, 2 Timothy 3 says, "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable," and then it lists four ways it's profitable, "that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works." What will thoroughly furnish you? What will bring you to maturity or perfection? All Scripture which is given by inspiration of God.

What then is our objective? To bring you to maturity. How mature? Like Christ. What is our tool? The Word of God. Now God has two tools that He uses. First Peter 1 talks about... 1 Peter 5 talks about suffering, and James 1 talks about trials. God provides the trials, God provides the suffering. That's not our task. We provide the Word. We feed the Word, God provides the circumstances of life, the blending of those circumstances and the input of the Word brings about the maturing of the saints. And we will continue to emphasize this, beloved, because this is continually the necessity.

I have heard people say in recent days, "You know, we have too much teaching at Grace Church." No, we don't have too much teaching. We still have some imperfection here. Would you agree to that? In my own life I see it. And I know you do in yours, that's facetious. We will have done the job when we are like Christ. Until that day we will continue to perfect the saints. And the only tool we have is the Word of God. We will not give it a secondary place. And, beloved, you have the same calling, to take the Word of God and to teach it to somebody else, to pass it on. Too much is invested in you. Too much is invested in me. And I'm passing it to you. And your other pastors are passing it to you. And your other teachers and whoever you have learned from and from whomever you have drawn your spiritual resource, way too much is invested in you for you to bail out. "To whom much is given...what?...much is required." And so we are committed to discipleship. We're committed to passing it on.

This can never be a spectator place. We will never settle for a professional pulpitism financed by lay spectators. We will never submit to the idea that all you need to do is come and hear it. We will never be content in our hearts until God has made of us disciples who disciple others. I can promise you and I've never asked God to give one more person to Grace Church, never. Because we haven't really made disciples and disciplers out of the ones we have. But at the same time I've thanked Him for every one He's given us...every one, because I accept the responsibility though I have a sense of never accomplishing it. God, help us every one to be reproductive.

Do you know how to make a disciple? Are you making disciples in your own home? Are you making disciples of people around you? Do you know how to reproduce? Let me give you a little hint. First Corinthians chapter 4, I think this is probably as concise a place in all of Scripture for understanding what it is to make a disciple. And by the way, our dear Lord Himself said this is the mandate. In Matthew 28:19 He said, "Go into all the world and...what?...make disciples." And what does that mean? Making disciples means, first of all, baptizing them in the name of the Lord Jesus which is the affirmation of their salvation. Secondly, teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I've commanded you. And to make a disciple you must bring them to Christ and teach them whatever Christ has commanded, the fullness of biblical truth. And so we are to make disciples.

You say, "Well I'm not called to it." Oh yes you are, if you're a Christian you're called to it. Your very life is to be reproductive. Out of your belly should flow rivers of living water to quench the thirst of others. You are not a cul de sac, you are not a dead end, you are not an exclamation point, you're only a comma...there is something coming after you...reproduction.

Look at 1 Corinthians 4 and find out how you do that. Paul is really letting the Corinthians have it. And at this point he knows after having been very sarcastic to them they're probably going to be saying, "Who does this guy think he is? Where does he come off getting on our case like this?" Because he really blistered them in verse 8 with sarcasm. And so in response to what he knows is in their minds he says in verse 14, "I write not these things to shame you but as my beloved sons I warn you for though you have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet have you not many fathers, for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel. Wherefore I beseech you..." Stop right there.

He says, "You want to know why I'm talking the way I'm talking? You want to know why I'm beseeching you the way I'm beseeching you? You want to know why I'm being sarcastic when I need to be sarcastic? It is because I am your spiritual father." "I" emphatic in the Greek in verse 15, "I only have begotten you through the gospel." I have a relationship to you as my beloved sons, verse 14 says. In other words, Paul says I have been caught up in your life in its birth and its growth and that's why I speak the way I speak. I'm your discipler. I'm your begetter. I'm your spiritual father.

And what is involved in that? Let me give you some principles. Study them on your own. First of all, in order to be a spiritual father you must beget. Verse 15, "I have begotten you through the gospel." You can't disciple somebody until they're born. You can't grow a child until you've born a child. And so to win someone to Christ is where it begins, or sometimes to pick up somebody else's spiritual orphan who is under nourished. But there must be a begetting. And it was Paul that went to Corinth and it was Paul who preached there and it was Paul who poured out his heart for 18 months until the church was born. I begot you, he said.

Second characteristic of a discipler is he loves, he calls them "my beloved sons." You will disciple someone when you love them. And by this I don't mean a mushy sentimental sort of a slushy saccharine syrupy relationship that has no spine. I mean the kind of commitment that gives a life for one who has a need. You will never really grow a disciple unless you make the commitment to love that person. And that means a firm, strong love that has parameters and limits and definitions. That means a love that forgives endlessly. That means a love that cares no matter how difficult it is to care. That means a love that meets needs no matter how costly it is to do that, time wise or financially. You are to love.

Thirdly, to make a spiritual son, to raise a spiritual child you not only beget and love but you warn, at the end of verse 14. Your love has to have some limits. Your love has to have some definition. What kind of love is it in a parent that never warns a child to stay away from a fire or a hot stove or hot water or the street or a big dog or a swimming pool? That isn't love, that's lack of love. Love warns and love calls for a certain kind of behavior. And if we are to disciple we must beget and we must love and we must warn.

And then he says in verse 16, "I beseech you, be you followers of me, we must set an example." We must be able to say you pattern your life after my life, you live the way I live. It's not wrong to say

that, it's the most right thing you can ever say if your life is right. I beseech you, be followers of me. Can you say that? Can you reproduce another life? Do you have somebody that you can think of immediately that you have begotten, loved, warned and for whom you set a pattern? God help us if we don't because if there's no second generation born out of this generation, this church can't last more than 30 years. There's got to be. If all it is is to come and hear John MacArthur do his thing, then we're in deep trouble. Because if God should remove me from this situation and there's no strength of ministry to one another and there's no building of the church down deep the way it's supposed to be built, then the future is bleak. So we must be committed to these things.

Another thing a discipler does, at the end of verse 17 Paul says, "I teach everywhere in every church," and he's just referring to the fact that he has taught the same things everywhere. A discipler teaches consistent truth. If you want to reproduce yourself you have to teach, you love and you warn and you set a pattern and then you teach, you feed the Word of God. Another thing, you have to discipline, you have to rap some knuckles, you have to get out your spiritual stick and spank a few times. That's why he says in verse 21, "If you want I'll come with a rod, if that's the way you choose." If your behavior doesn't change I'm going to give you a good spiritual whipping.

It's just the way you raise a child, isn't it? You beget a child, you love a child, you warn a child, you set an example for a child, you teach a child and you spank a child when a spanking is due. And that's exactly the way you raise a spiritual son. And when you're all done you can do what happen in verse 17, Paul says, "I'm so concerned about you that I have sent Timothy." And my first reaction to that when I read it was, "Well if you're so concerned, why don't you go yourself?" The answer is, "Timothy is my beloved son, he's faithful in the Lord and he'll bring you into remembrance of my ways."

Listen, you've raised a disciple. When in the most crucial situation imaginable you can send him in your place knowing he'll represent you. The greatest challenge of my life is to reduplicate myself, not to preach a sermon. The greatest challenge of my life as a Christian is to give to the next generation somebody who has got what I have and more. I feel that if my sons and daughters aren't better than I am, I failed because they should take all that I have and all the rest that God can give beyond what I could give. And I would believe in my own heart that this church should be better when I left than it ever is when I'm here because it can take all that I have and where I fail can fill it in with that which others have to offer. If the church follows the pattern that God has designed, that's what should happen. The church should ever grow. And yet, how many times do we see great ministries and all of a sudden a man goes or something changes and they just go back like a balloon with the air let out...they fly around endlessly and aimlessly for a while until they finally land flat.

Who are you discipling? Who are you accountable to? Who is accountable to you? And, beloved, by this I don't mean just friendship. You know, I've seen relationships that miss the point where they go on and on and on and on and they become non-productive and they have no redeeming value. They just go on and you just get a little group and it's us four, no more, shut the door, you know...you just bar yourself in to this little closed kind of a thing and you assume that that's a discipleship group. Listen, after a while the Lord said good-bye, didn't He? I'm going away and I'll be back. And it's been a couple a thousand years. And Paul went on a journey and he took Silas a time and then he took Barnabas and then Luke and then Timothy and he moved around and he invested the time but it had a termination and then he turned them loose. It's that way in a life, too. You know, when your children reach a certain age they ought to leave. If they stay too long it's a little depressing. You wonder where you failed when they're 48 and you're still saying, "Go upstairs and clean your room,

Charlie." There is design in human life to have a termination to the discipling process. And I know in my life that as much as you would cherish long-lasting, unending relationships with people, there comes a time when you cut them off and you go to somebody else because the need is greater, you see. And you only have so much to give anyway. And life can't be made up of just hopping around to social expedencies. We must give ourself to the reproduction of life.

Grace Church can be destroyed, there's no question in my mind. But it won't be legislation, and it won't be by intervention, and it won't be by persecution, what it will be is when we fail to have godly leaders to stand for Christ, when we fail to maintain a high and holy standard, when we fail to continually pursue spiritual goals, or when we fail to be personally committed to the process of reproducing disciples to bring people to Christ's likeness. What are you really investing in? That's the question.

Fifthly, I believe Satan attacks us at another point, he attacks at the point of an active ministering people. If we ever abandon that, we're in real trouble and it's a corollary to my first point that I made this morning.

When I first came to Grace Church, two pastors had died of a heart attack and in the interim time when they didn't have a pastor, the church actually grew spiritually, and in some cases numerically because the people had a heart for the work. And if you'll remember what I just read you in Ephesians 4, you'll remember that it said that the pastor/teacher and the evangelist was given for the perfecting of the saints. And the next phrase is, "For the work of the ministry." Why are we to mature the saints? To do the ministry. It's not for us...the staff, the pastors...but for you. It's your ministry, yours is the work of the service of the Lord. You are to present your body a living sacrifice to do His good work, to fulfill His good purpose. It is your ministry, it is your church. And you are to be involved in its ministries. A church where the staff does everything is in trouble, really troubled.

And I remember when I came here that that wasn't the case. They...Grace Church had grown and I came to fill the pulpit one Sunday was all. And somebody said, "Would you be interested in becoming the pastor here?" And so I began to think about it, we talked about it a little bit and I remember one of the elders said to me, "You know, we have a whole group of people who want to work, we just need somebody to tell us what to do." Well that's like saying, "Sic 'em" to a mad dog, frankly. You know, you just pray for something like that. And this church always had a commitment to that...to be involved. I've had people who have been here and gone to other cities say, "We've gone to other churches but we've never found a church where the people were so close and caring as they were here." I trust that's true in your life. I know it's true in the lives of many.

But we are to be doing the work of the ministry. And I think the church for many years never even saw this, they just came and sat in great big long tunnels and watched some routine going on up front. That was it. They were just there checking in, non-involvement was characteristic. And then, thank God, we began to rediscover the concept of spiritual gifts and people began to open Ephesians chapter 4 and find that earlier in that chapter, verses 7 and 8, it talks about the Spirit giving gifts. And then we began to study Romans chapter 12, how that God has given the measure of faith to every man, and to some the gift of prophecy and to some the gift of giving, and to some the gift of administration. And then we came to 1 Corinthians 12 and we found there were other gifts, there were gifts of helps and gifts of mercy and many other things that God had enabled the church to do as He had poured out His love and giftedness to every believer.

And then we came to 1 Peter chapter 4 verses 10 and 11 where Peter calls on us if we have that gift to be using that gift to the glory of God. If it's a serving gift, to serve to the glory of God. If it's a speaking gift, to speak the oracles of God. So that we are gifted by God's Holy Spirit for a capacity of ministry, we are like a channel through which the Spirit flows. Nothing is more wonderfully refreshing in the church than to see people using those gifts. Nothing is more wonderful than to go to the hospital and find someone already there with the gift of mercy, showing that mercy to one in need. Nothing is more wonderful than to watch people busy using the gift of helps to assist in some very needful area. Nothing is more exciting than to see someone with the gift of teaching expressing the gift. Conversely nothing so tragic as to see the atrophy of a gift because of its non-use.

Peter says, "As every man is received THE gift." Definite article...and so people have said, "Well what do you mean, THE gift?" I believe...and I'm not going to go into all the whole study of it, just this much...but I believe that THE gift identifies the uniqueness of every individual's gift. We can argue about whether there are 11 or 12 or 13 or 14 spiritual gifts. I don't think any of those are right. I think there are as many spiritual gifts as there are Christians. And I think what each of us has is a spiritual snowflake which is a combination of all the categories of giftedness blended together for that unique gift mold into our personality so that for you, beloved, get this one, there is no substitute. Did you get that? There is no second string you, none. We've got to play the game a different way if you're not involved because you are a spiritual snowflake, as unique to the heart of God as every other individual. And He's gifted you to serve in His church. You've got to have an outlet. Satan could literally kill the church with just the laziness of the flesh, just indolence, just not using your Spirit-given gift.

What a tragic thing it is. Oh is it so tragic. Not only does the church miss the use of the gift, and we limp along because you're not doing it and the people around you aren't receiving it, but you know what happens? It jades your thinking. I've noticed something in my athletic career which is fast coming to an end, I might add. But I've noticed something in the years of being involved in that and that's this, parental bench warmers ultimately become first-rate critics. You sit on the bench a while and pretty soon you start to criticize the people that are playing instead of you. "Boy, I could do better than that. Look at that guy. Boy, that's pathetic." And the next thing is, the coach is a moron if he can't see that I ought to be in there. And you start criticizing everybody else on the team and then you start criticizing the coach and pretty soon you're rooting for the opposition. You hope you lose, that will show them, put me on a bench, we lose.

I had this vividly illustrated when I was in college. We went out to play a game against Chino Men's Prison. Now we were not another prison, I want to make that clear. In those days Chino used to have a football team and they'd play a practice game against the Rams and some colleges would put them on a practice schedule. We went out there to play them one time. And what was really amazing was that we noticed...it was the first year we did this and a guy in the first play or two broke his leg or did something to his leg, I remember, and they carried him off on a stretcher. And the crowd applauded, they loved it. Now the only crowd there were the inmates, the bleachers were all full of inmates. And they loved it. I mean, the guy got hurt. And we thought it was strange, I remember, talking about it in the huddle. This is really weird. Of course, there was no one there to root for us to start with at all. We figured it was going to be tough. Do you know that whole game they rooted for us? No matter what that other team, their own prison guys did, they never rooted for them. They booed them, they yelled and screamed when we scored a touchdown. Misery loves company. People who are losers don't like anybody else to succeed. And you give me a whole lot of bench warmers, indolent, lazy people who are sitting on the fringes and I'll show you a whole stack of critics, inevitable, who will sit

in judgment on everything because they're not involved. They don't know what the real battle is.

I've had a lot of people say, "You know, I said a lot of things but I really didn't understand the issues." Haven't you said that? I have. I've jumped to criticize somebody some time when I wasn't involved in what they were involved in. I believe that if we don't have an active ministering people whose lives are absorbed in totally committing themselves to the ministry of God through His people, that we're going to come up with a lot of people sitting around evaluating everybody else. There's something sympathetic about being in there and getting all the knocks and the licks. And when I want a little sympathy, I go to somebody who knows what it is to do what I do. Have you noticed that? Who understands. Inactive people become critics.

And a fear that I have in our church is that we would have fringes of people who are inactive, who are not ministering, who are not using their gifts, who are not sharing their lives, who all of a sudden become the critics and the source of dissension and division in the church.

A sixth and a last for this morning and just briefly, one other that connects with these two that I've given you, I believe Satan can destroy us if we fail to disciple, if we fail to be active in ministering to each other, doing visitation, meeting needs, whatever it is...and thirdly, or sixthly, overall, I believe that Satan can destroy us if we fail to manifest a biblical love...a biblical love. Now I've preached on this so many times that I'm certainly not going to insult your intelligence by going back over all of these things. Suffice it to say this, that biblical love is self-sacrificing service rendered to someone in need, it is not an emotion. It is an act of loving service...self-sacrificing. And if there's anything that will strangle a church, it is for people to sit in isolation in their seats, coming and going, as if nobody had any needs and never touching anybody else's life. That's tragic.

You know, we are a body, aren't we? And I believe one of the reasons the Lord instituted the Lord's table and the Lord's supper is to call us together to unity, to call us together at the foot of the cross. The New Testament just continually hammers away that we are mutually dependent and we are to love one another and we are to care for one another. But what we do is we criticize one another, we gripe about one another, we set ourselves up as little tin gods and rule over everybody, we call all the shots, we gossip about this and that and the other. May God silence our mouth, may we know the unity that is born of true love.

You know, the Lord wanted to make of His people one. He prayed for His disciples that they would be one in John 17. He cried out to all of us in John 13 to love one another as He loved us, that the world may know that we were His disciples. We must have unity, people, in the church. We must. And the thing that you just never see the end of is discord, discord and it's always...it's not a major thing in this church at all, we've never had any major discord. And I think it's because we've always tried to deal with the minor ones. But incessantly there is just criticism and carping and second-guessing and undermining and doing this and doing that and speaking against someone and all of that. And you just get weary of hearing it. What do you talk about when you get together? Is it edifying, building up? Or does it just tear down and devastate and destroy? If we really loved each other we'd be all about the positive things, wouldn't we?

You say, "Yeah, but you don't know what she did." I don't even care, just forgive infinitely, as Jesus said 70 times seven. And if it's something that's going to effect the body sinfully, then go through the steps of discipline, go in love, and then take somebody and follow the process. But just to criticize and just to chasten verbally and just to evil speak and just to divide and to split into faction is just not

right and that's what Paul was trying to say in the letter to the Corinthians...it is devastating your testimony and it is only a symptom of a larger corruption that extends to every area of your life.

What do you say..you say, "What do you mean, John, by loving one another?" Well let me give you a basic idea. I think it means just fulfilling the one anothers of the New Testament. Confess your faults one to another, forgive one another, bear one another's burdens. If something is wrong with somebody, don't make a broadcast out of it, be sympathetic and pray about it. Rebuke one another, if need be. Comfort one another. Exhort one another. Stimulate one another to love and good works. Edify one another. Admonish one another. Pray for one another. Love one another. Be kind to one another. Comfort one another. Teach one another, on and on.

You have a responsibility to each other. Boy, the saddest thing that happened is for us to get in a little ivory tower and feel that, "Boy, if people don't come up to our standard, they're out." We should be out of that ivory tower reaching our arms out to touch people. The Holy Spirit says in Ephesians 4:3 that we are to be endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. We don't have to create peace and we don't have to create unity, we just have to keep it. It's the work of the Spirit. And we devastate it with sin.

Would you look with me for just a parting word at Philippians 2...Philippians 2? In Philippians 2, and I want to just look at verses 2 and following very quickly, Paul says, "Fulfill ye my joy that you be likeminded." And the end of the verse, "Of one accord, of one mind."

Now listen to me, the church is to be of one mind, of one accord. And back in 1 Corinthians 1:10 he says you are to think the same things and you are even to speak the same things. Imagine...a church where everybody thought the same, spoke the same, that's what it says. That we are to have this kind of unity in the church. O God, give us this solidarity. God, give us this kind of unity.

You know, we have a lot of critics in the world, not all of them are outside the church. There are other churches that criticize us. I don't know why, jealousy or whatever, I don't know, or maybe we've been unfaithful to them and unloving in some way. But we have all kinds of critics. And I really believe the heart and soul of silencing the critics is to be sure that all of us are united together in one so that the testimony for Christ is so clear and so loud and so pure that there really isn't any legitimate criticism at all. There must be unity. We must be committed to each other.

How does it happen? Verse 2, "You have to have the same love." You have to love everybody the same. By that I don't mean you like everybody the same, or you have the same physical attraction or emotional attraction, but that you're willing to make the necessary sacrifice to meet the need of anybody no matter who it is. Whoever your neighbor is, even if it's a battered and beaten and broken Jew and you're a Samaritan. It doesn't matter who it is. If you love everybody the same, in other words, if you're committed to serve anybody no matter who they are, or what they think or what they're like. I believe the reason people today are so comfortable in television churches is because they don't have any responsibility to people that they wouldn't like to get next to. But in the living church, the real church, not the fantasy church, we must have unity and that unity is born of a same love where you love people the same.

You say, "Well how do you do that?" Verse 3, "Let nothing be done through strife or vain glory but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than themselves. Look not every man on his own

things but every man also on the things of others."

You want to hear something? You never have unity without love and you never have love without humility...never. The only people who love are humble people. The proud ones are looking for others to love them. The only people who really love are humble. They're the ones who in lowliness of mind are giving themselves away all the time. They're the ones who are non-self-seeking. They're not looking on their own things. You cannot have unity in a vacuum, it is born out of love. And you cannot have love in a vacuum, it is born out of humility.

You say, "Aha, but humility is just as elusive as love and unity. Where do you get that?" And so you go to verse 5, who is the greatest illustration of humility? "Let this mind be of you which was in Christ Jesus who being in the form of God thought it not robbery to be equal with God but made Himself of no reputation and took upon Him the form of a servant and was made in the likeness of men and being found in fashion as a man He humbled Himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross."

Listen, people, humility is gained by a focus on Christ's humiliation. Many years ago when I first came to Grace Church for two solid years, 96 sermons, 2,000 hours plus of study I went through the gospel of John and on every page I gazed at the majesty of Jesus Christ in His earthly humiliation. And it was the humbling experience of my life to see Christ. And when I saw Him humbled as the very God of gods and I saw what I was, I saw how desperately I needed humility. Humility, beloved is born out of knowledge of Christ, the deep knowledge of Christ gives birth to humility. Humility makes possible love and love produces unity. O, beloved, if we do not have that intense loving, caring spirit that brings unity, Satan will destroy. And you know who suffers? It is the body of Christ that is fractured.

I've recently talked with some people who said, "Well, we're going to leave Grace Church." And they gave some reasons that I didn't think were valid and said some very, very evil things against the elders and things. And they said, "And we're...there's a lot of people going with us, too."

And I said, "You know something," I said, "you can't hurt me, you can't hurt me in that." And I said, "You can't hurt the elders in that really, because we're just human and we aren't the issue. But what you will do is add another scar to the body of Christ. Christ will be grieved. That's the issue."

Beloved, Satan can destroy Grace Church. No question about it. Not by communism and bad legislation, not by unjust judges or the IRS, but by a lack of godly leaders, a failure to live a holy standard, a lack of spiritual goals to drive for, a failure to disciple to Christ's likeness, a failure to minister our gifts and a loss of a loving, caring, forgiving spirit.

Listen, people were drawn to Jesus because He opened up His life like a gift. Will you do that to one another that our church may be what God wants it to be? Now listen, the heart of all that I've said I'm going to say tonight. I don't know why I had to save it till last, more of you would have heard it if I'd have given it this morning, but I want you to come. Now I'm going to trust that God will have the right people here as I draw this to a conclusion tonight. You pray for me this afternoon. Let's bow together.

Father, we've just discussed half of these things and yet so vital are they. I pray that You'll give wisdom tonight as we finish. Give us a great evening of music, praise. I thank You, Lord, too, for this

morning hour that we don't have a major issue at Grace Church that's threatening us. I thank You that we don't have some great blight upon us, that there's not some huge division or moral blemish in the life of one of our leaders. I thank You for that and I thank You, Lord, too that You've called us to be warned while things are yet small, before the enemy crashes through the gate and our lack of vigilance becomes our destruction. Lord, help us to know that it's the little foxes that spoil the vines and to set our face as flint to obey You. I thank You, as I said earlier in the service, for the many, many people who minister so capably, so wonderfully, who volunteer, who train, who will even yet today sign up to be involved in some other ministries. I thank You that this is a church of living ministry. Keep it that way, O Father, give great wisdom to all of us that we may see the fulfillment of Your good pleasure for this one small assembly of people who love You. And bless Your dear church around the world wherever it gathers, purify it and may it truly be Christ in the world, drawing men to Himself. We thank You in His blessed name. Amen.

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