

How to Destroy Grace Church, Part 4

Scripture: Selected Scriptures

Code: 1394

As you know, I've been talking issues facing Grace Church. And for the last few sessions together, both today and last Lord's day, we've been focusing on what Satan is endeavoring to do at Grace Church. And there's no question about the fact that this is really going on. Let me just give you a graphic illustration.

Last Monday night we had a New Year's Eve service and I was ill and so I decided it would be best if I stayed home until the time of the communion and that I not do the baptism so as not to give anybody what I had. And so the baptism went along and then the film and other things and I came. And when I arrived I was told a very, very strange event had happened, that none of you know about, and that is that there were several young men who belonged to a certain cult known as The Divine Metaphysical Research Society, Satan's lies come in all kinds of packages, The Divine Metaphysical Research Society, and that there were several of the young men who are the teachers and leaders of this society in this particular area who during the baptismal service had found their way into the back, attempting to prevent people from being baptized in the name of Christ. And also, accosting them when they had been baptized and came out of there to teach them the lies of Satan.

Now you think the battle is out there? It isn't. Satan has become very, very bold. One of those same young men was seen around here tonight, I don't know if he's here now but we're not interested in dialoguing with those kind of people, we're just interested in eliminating them from this congregation because they are emissaries of Satan. And if anybody comes unto you, the Bible says, and offers you any other Christ, we're not even to bid them God's speed or we become a partaker in their evil deed. We will not turn loose wolves among the sheep.

The battle is right here, people. It's hard to imagine, isn't it, that in the warm and wonderful confines of a New Year's Eve service Satan would have his emissaries right in the baptismal area where people are preparing to be baptized, trying to withhold that from them. It's important that we realize just how close the battle is. Let's pray together before we look together at the Word of God.

Father, we thank You for protecting the folks on Monday night from these false teachers. And even as the Apostle Paul pointed out Hymenaeus and Alexander so Timothy and his congregation would know who to avoid, and even as he pointed out others in 2 Timothy chapter 1 and verse 15 by name that they might be avoided, so, Father, give us the vigilance and the diligence to recognize and to

point out those in our midst who seek to corrupt and bring in the doctrines of devils. We pray, Father, that You would help us to stand true and to be spared from their effect, at the same time we would pray for their souls that if they have not gone beyond the day of grace that Your great mercy and grace would yet reach out. If there's any spark of hope and touch them that they might know the grace of Christ, that they might come to repent of their evil deeds and to open their lives to the truth, that they might not spend eternity in hell without Thee.

Father, as we bring to a climax and a close tonight our discussion of the marks of an effective church, the areas where Satan attacks, we pray that You'd give us wisdom and insight and we'll give You the glory in Christ's name. Amen.

I think by this time you know the subject we're dealing with. I always feel like I need to explain that if you are...came to Grace Church and had heard about our expository ministry, verse by verse, book by book, this isn't it. Come back next week and we'll be back studying Matthew chapter 6 in the morning and Daniel chapter 5. By the way, next Sunday night we're going to study the three friends of Daniel in the fiery furnace and we're going to begin a phenomenal and exciting look at their courage in the Lord. But that's for next time.

But for today and last Lord's day, we've been looking at the subject, "How to destroy Grace Church," because I've been so very much aware of Satan's tremendous attacks. And last Monday night, as I mentioned, is just one illustration of what the enemy has been endeavoring to do in our midst. And this is not isolated, people. Not at all. These kinds of things occur repeatedly. We don't always know about them, at least all of us don't. But Satan does all he can to destroy what God does.

Now we said four and a half years ago that there were some marks of an effective church. And we have found that those very marks that we established as the direction of our church are the very areas where Satan attacks us. The first one we mentioned to you was a plurality of godly leaders. And Satan attacks us at that area. In fact, we were talking the other day that every time we come to this part of the year when we are selecting new elders and we are reassigning responsibilities of elders on the board, it seems as though there's always a major event that happens to create some kind of a chaos, as Satan tries to worm his way into the process of appointing the godly men to lead the church.

We saw also that Satan has attacked us in the area of our standard of holiness. There is this constant attack to lower the standard of acceptable behavior, to water down the virtues that the Bible calls for in terms of our behavior in life.

Thirdly, we saw that Satan attacks us in the area of our spiritual objectives and goals by making us become lazy and indolent and self-satisfied and settled and thinking everything is the way it ought to

be. And we become kind of smug and content and we forget that this is a war and this is a race. And it wasn't won and it hasn't been run and we still must pursue.

And then this morning we named three other areas where Satan attacks us and that is we are committed to a strong emphasis on discipleship and we see Satan attacking in that area, trying to disrupt the discipleship process by creating a spectator mentality. Or by people assuming that a friendship is a discipleship fulfillment. Or by us just never passing on the legacy of faith that God has granted to us but becoming, as we said this morning, spiritual cul de sacs where everything just comes to an end.

A fifth principle for an effective church is an active ministering people. And we've seen how Satan endeavors to end that, to make sure Christians don't use their spiritual gifts and minister to one another.

And then finally, sixthly, this morning, we looked at the idea that Satan attacks us in the area of our love for one another. And we summed it up this morning by saying that Grace Church can be destroyed. There's no question about that. It can be destroyed readily so by a lack of godly leaders, a failure to keep the standard of holiness, a lack of spiritual goals for which we drive, failure to disciple one another to Christ's likeness, failure to minister our gifts, failure to love one another in a caring, forgiving and intense way.

Let me come to a seventh point now and I'm going to run through the final ones rather rapidly. Number seven, Satan can destroy us if we concentrate too much on ourselves and our people and our program and we fail to penetrate the community. When we talked about this four and a half years ago we said that if a church is to be effective it must penetrate its community. We must penetrate this community for Christ. With all of our preoccupation with loving one another, with all of our concern about ministering spiritual gifts, with all of the tremendous effort that we make toward discipleship, with all of our spiritual goals and plans and strivings, with all of the concern about a high level of holiness, with all of the direction that we give toward seeing godly men lead this congregation, if all of that leads us to become self-centered and ingrown, it can destroy us. We must turn out. We must reach out. We cannot inbreed and produce anything other than deformity. And so there must be a penetration of this community for Christ.

And we have shared so many, many times the need for this. There must be evangelism. I told you this morning that in order to be a discipler you must beget, there must be evangelism. Now I thank God over the last three or four years particularly, God has touched our hearts in the area of evangelism and people have been won to Christ. I'm kind of curious. How many of you have been won to Christ in the last year? Put your hand up. If you've come to Christ in the last year, put your hand up. That's great, God bless you. Maybe a hundred or a hundred and fifty people or so. I don't know, maybe more. I thank God for that but that's not a drop in the bucket, is it? I kind of think that

for every one of us who knows Jesus Christ there ought to be somebody else who just came to know Jesus Christ. There ought to be such a commitment.

You know, the church can penetrate a community in a lot of ways. And it isn't just by going down the block, you know, and buttonholing people and saying, "Brother, you're on your way to hell." I remember when I was learning how to preach in Bible college and they would drive me up and drop me in the bus depot and say, "All right, preach. We'll be back in an hour." And I would stand in the Greyhound Bus Depot and I would, first of all, say, "Lord, You've got to help me cause this is really dumb." All these transients and people roaming around a bus station and all this diesel fuel, all this noise and racket and people banging in and out of doors and there I am all of the age of 18 years old preaching. People are saying, "So young to have lost his mind. Poor kid." That's where it all started for me.

There are a lot of ways to penetrate the community and they don't have to be like that. Finally after a couple of weeks they dropped me off and then I wouldn't preach any more, I'd just go around and talk to individuals and try to share Christ with them and I found that to be much more fruitful. Now we did have some successful street meetings. We finally decided if they're going to make us do that we're going to get some music and get a guy that can play an accordion and get somebody that can sing and get a little PA system and go down on a street corner and do it the way it ought to be done and do it the best we can. But there are a lot of other ways.

Do you know that according to a survey that was done in the United States some years ago, the number one reason people go to a church is the looks of the grounds? Did you know that? Do you want to know why we mow the lawn? You want to know why we try to make facilities that look nice and have some flowers and...and enhance the community? Listen, if you'd have lived in this neighborhood some years ago, this entire property right here was weeds and chicken coops, old dilapidated, beat-up chicken coops. We used to use those chicken coops for our Sunday school classes. We used every other one because ever intermittent one was occupied by an old wino...an old bum and we didn't want to throw them out. And it was difficult to win them to the Lord because they were never sober. It was a mess. And Grace Community Church changed the face of this community so that...sometimes I read real estate ads in the newspapers that say, "Near Grace Church." There are lots of ways to penetrate the community.

I remember when Joe Doria(?) and his wife Ursula came here to Grace Church and we had a discussion and about their family and all. And I asked, "What was it that brought you here? And what was it that ultimately brought you to Christ?" And they said, "It was the looks of the grounds that attracted us."

The second reason people go to church is the ease of parking. But that's only the beginning. The third reason they go to church is when they see something's happening there. Fourth reason they go

to church is the nursery. And the fifth reason is the friendliness of the people. And the sixth reason is the pastor.

I'll never forget a Jewish lady who was down at the synagogue trying to get counseling for a broken marriage. And she hadn't paid her dues and so they said, "We can't counsel you till you pay your dues." And she got very upset and she came to Grace Church and she walked in the Family Center, we were still preaching over there. And she listened and she watched and she looked. And within a week she received Jesus Christ.

And she said to me one day, she said, "I never heard a word you said, I just kept looking around at these incredibly friendly happy people," and I said, "I don't know what they've got but I want it." There's a lot of ways to penetrate a community.

In fact, I think it's very, very true that the corporate testimony in love and excitement, the corporate testimony that we give as a church in the community is an attractive thing that initiates contact for Jesus Christ. And I believe that this tremendous great group of people is a living testimony to the vitality of life in Christ that this community has to face. We penetrate this community by our presence here. And when we leave this place and inundate Jo Jo's or Mike's Pizza or Bob's Big Boy or...I don't know where you go, wherever it is it says something to this community. The early church, it says in Acts 2, went everywhere praising God in fellowship, in love, breaking bread and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added daily to the church such as should be saved.

You show me a broken, a weak, an unhappy, ineffective, non-exciting, not-growing church and I'll show you a church that has no impact in the community for Christ...none. And when somebody from that church tries to communicate Christ to somebody, it's hard to believe it because they can't see that it's that exciting. I love it when Grace Community Church creates the largest traffic jams in the San Fernando Valley. It ought to be that way. That early church was an issue. They were so excited. They literally filled the temple. You read Acts 2, Acts 4, Acts 5, they were so excited, they would fill the temple and they would be praising God and they would be praying and they would be studying the apostles' doctrine and they would be fellowshiping and they would go from house to house breaking bread. And they would be having a wonderful time. And the whole of the city was in awe of them and finally came to them and said, "You have filled all Jerusalem with your doctrine." I thank God that this church has penetrated the community and we have to keep doing that.

I like it when somebody from the news media calls me and says, "You know, we want to know what's going on over there." I like it when the ERA marches in the patio. I like it when the newspapers say that they're saying something different over there. Now I'm not just trying to make trouble but we are trying to call people to the attention of the Word of God.

The early church went through the world shattering the world. And when the world reacted in persecution and scattered them in the eighth chapter of Acts, they went everywhere preaching Christ. And all it did was scatter them into the Gentile world and marvelous things began to happen.

Beloved, we have been through a study of the Beatitudes in the book of Matthew and if we ever lived that beatitude character, if we ever really begin to live the way the Beatitudes tell us to live...and you ought to keep that tape series somewhere very near so that you could listen to it about once a month...if we ever lived the way the Beatitudes tell us to live, the result is in Matthew 5:13 and following, we will become salt...and what?...and light in the world. And men will see our good works and glorify our Father who is in heaven.

Does your life give opportunity to witness for Christ? Does your life create a platform in which the testimony of Christ is believable? I believe that every one of us as we go into the community, the way we live, in our jobs, in the...the way we do business in the stores and the restaurants of the city of Los Angeles or wherever we live, wherever we go we are laying down a platform that either makes our testimony or somebody else's testimony believable or not believable. When somebody stands up and says, "Well, I want to tell you about Jesus Christ," and the answer comes back, "Ah, I used to know some Christians, let me tell you what they did to me." That's the end of your testimony. The credibility is laid by the lives of God's people. And then we have a platform from which to speak, don't we? And then even though all of us may not do the speaking, if we've lived the godly lives we share in the drawing of the net because we have been part of laying down that believable platform.

You know, Jesus said, "Go into the highways and byways and compel them to come," it isn't just influence. It isn't just that we are to influence the world. We are to proclaim to the world. We are to preach Christ to the world. We are to reach out to the world. Let me just take you in a running tour starting in the thirteenth chapter of Acts, for a moment, very, very briefly, and I want you to get a feeling for how the early church penetrated the world.

In Acts 13:44 it says, "And the next Sabbath day came almost the whole city together to hear the Word of God." Now that's what we want to see. We want to make an influence in the city as was made in the thirteenth chapter of Acts. Look at the fourteenth chapter, "And it came to pass...verse 1...in Iconium that they went both together into the synagogue of the Jews and so spoke that a great multitude both of the Jews and of the Greeks believed." Chapter 16 verse 4, "And as they went through the cities they delivered them the decrees to keep that were ordained of the Apostles and elders who were at Jerusalem, and so were the churches established in the faith and increased in number daily." Chapter 17 verse 2, "And Paul as his manner was went in unto them and three Sabbath days reasoned with them out of the Scriptures in Thessalonica, opening and alleging that Christ must needs have suffered and risen again from the dead and that this Jesus whom I preach unto you is Christ. And some of them believed and consorted with Paul and Silas and of the devout Greeks, a great multitude and of the chief women not a few." Again, the advance, the evangelism of

the church. Down in verse 11 they came to Berea and they were more noble than those in Thessalonica and they received the Word with all readiness of mind and they searched the Scripture daily whether those things were so. Therefore, many of them believed, also of honorable women who were Greeks and of men, not a few."

Chapter 18 verse 28, "For he mightily...speaking of Apollos here...convinced the Jews and that publicly showing by the Scriptures that Jesus was Christ." Publicly. You know, in our artificial world where everything is pretaped, preaching in the church of Jesus Christ is a public presentation of the gospel that's live as it happens...confronting the world. Sometimes people will say to me, "You know, So-and-so is here today, you want to kind of be careful because he's So-and-so or she's So-and-so." And you know, I think about that for a few seconds and then I say, "Well, I'm going to go ahead and preach what I'm going to preach anyway and just thank God for the privilege." Because that's the calling, publicly to show that Jesus is Christ. You come in to the nineteenth chapter of Acts and nothing changes. The great preaching goes on and many, verse 18, that believed came and confessed and showed their deeds and they burned their magical books. And verse 20, I love it, this could sum up the book of Acts, "So mightily grew the Word of God and prevailed."

You know, I believe the Word of God can prevail. In fact, and it may seem strange, I think there's a...there's almost a desperation in our society where people are finally saying, "Is there anything we can believe?" And I think we with the Word of God can step into that vacuum. They went everywhere shattering the kingdom of Satan.

In Acts chapter 20 and verse 21, Paul says that he was testifying both to the Jews and the Greeks, repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ. And he has been so faithful to do it that in verse 26 he says, "I testify to you this day that I am pure from the blood of all men. I have discharged my divine calling and responsibility." And he went everywhere. At the end of the letter to the Philippians he says, "The saints greet you, chiefly they of Caesar's household." Which means that even when he was a prisoner, when he was chained to a Roman soldier, he was busy leading people to Christ. The problem was not for Paul being chained to the soldier, the real problem was the poor soldier that had to be chained to Paul.

What about us? I thank God for the people that are involved in EE. I thank God for the people that are out there compelling people to come to Christ. But at the same time, I have a great burden in my heart that we just constantly fill this auditorium with us. I love all of you, I'm so glad you come. And, frankly, I don't know what we'd do with the others if they did come. But I think the Lord could take care of juggling the statistics. I just feel that we need to be setting our hearts and minds to reaching people for Christ. One of the things that we really want to do is to open up the possibility of doing that some way. I don't know what the future holds. We have this building designed to put in a balcony, we can get another thousand seats in here and have two services on Sunday night if we need and one on Thursday, Friday and Saturday, we don't know. But we want to provide the opportunity for you

to bring people so that they can hear the preaching of the Word of God. We want you to become fishers of men that reach out to touch the lost for Christ. This, I believe, to be such a high calling.

Some months ago when I preached on Matthew chapter 4, I read you this little parable. I want to remind you of it because this can happen to us, friends. Grace Church can become such a great place to be that just let it exist for its own sake and we forget who is out there. And this parable illustrates it better than anything I've ever read. You might remember it as I read it, but it's a good reminder.

"On a dangerous sea coast where ship wrecks often occur there was once a crude little life-saving station. The building was just a hut and there was only one boat but the few devoted members kept a constant watch over the sea and with no thought for themselves went out every day and night tirelessly searching for the lost. Many lives were saved by this wonderful little life-saving station. So it became famous.

"Some of those who were saved and various others in the surrounding area wanted to become associated with the station and give their time and money and effort for the support of its work. New life boats were bought and new life-saving crews were trained. And the little life-saving station grew. Some of the members of the life-saving station were unhappy that the building was so crude and poorly equipped and they felt a little more comfortable place should be provided as the first refuge of those who were saved from drowning in the sea. So they replaced the emergency cots and the emergency beds and put better furniture in the large building. Now the life-saving station became a popular gathering place for its members and they decorated it beautifully and furnished it exquisitely because they used it as a sort of a club.

"Fewer members were now interested in going to sea on life-saving missions so they hired lifeboat crews to do the work. The life-saving motif still prevailed in the club's decoration and there was a liturgical lifeboat in the room where the club met.

"About this time a large ship was wrecked off the coast and the hired crews brought in loads of cold, wet, half-drowned people and they were dirty and sick and some of them had black skin and some of them had yellow skin. And the beautiful new club was considerably messed up. So the property committee immediately had a shower house built outside the club where the victims of the ship wrecks could be cleaned up before they came inside.

"At the next meeting there was a split in the club membership, most of the members wanted to stop the life-saving activity because it was unpleasant and a hindrance to the normal social life of the club. Some members insisted on life-saving operations as the primary purpose and pointed out they were still called a life-saving station. But they were voted down and told if they wanted to save the lives of various kinds of people who were shipwrecked in those waters, they could begin their own life-saving

station down the coast. In which they did.

"And as the years went by, the new station experienced the same changes that occurred in the old and it evolved into a club and yet another life-saving station was founded. And history continued to repeat itself. And if you visit the coast today you find a number of exclusive clubs along the shore, ship wrecks are frequent in those waters and most of the people drown."

Pretty vivid, isn't it? The church that ceases to be a life-saving station and becomes a club, Satan pushes us that way. Churches today in America are filled with entertainment...entertainment. Frankly, I realize that they have to entertain the people to bring them back because the preaching drove them away in many cases. But churches in America are engaged in entertainment. Churches are content with just getting members. They wait around till another church splits and then when they get a new load they think they're growing.

We're not committed to that. The temptation is to avoid winning the world while becoming like the world. The church at Pergamos, Revelation chapter 2, began to compromise with the world and it was so involved in becoming like the world it never had any message to confront the world. People say, "Well, we just have to accept the homosexuals and we need to accept the Women's Liberation and we have to accept all of these things that are happening in our society and that we just kind of have to take it easy. I'm certainly anxious to be loving about it." And so eventually you just have no message left.

I'm always criticized for taking a firm biblical position on marriage and divorce, a firm biblical position on the family, homosexuality, morality, a biblical view of salvation, a biblical view of evangelism, a biblical view of true ecumenism and not the false church that keeps coming together. And people say, "They're criticizing us for that." But we have to offer an alternative to the world. Now some people think that the answer is TV, that if we really want to reach the world we've got to get on TV. Well, you know, television just like radio has, I think, helped a lot where Christ is truly presented. But that's a fantasy, folks, not a reality. You understand that? That's a fantasy. That's just a...that's where we can just create a hiding place for people. The electronic church inevitably comes through as an expression of cultural religion. It apes the values and the glitter and the trappings of the very system that the world has developed. It's slick, it's entertainment oriented, it's very low-key on content and it's totally non-confrontive in many cases. It has compromising music and the whole thing.

Martin Marty said, "Late Saturday night Mr. and Mrs. Invisible Religion get their jollies from the ruffled shirted, pink tuxedoed men and high coiffeured low-neckline celebrity women who talk about themselves under the guise of born-again autobiographies. Sunday morning the watchers get their jollies as Holy Ghost entertainers caress microphones among spurting fountains. Are they to turn off the very set and then make their way down the block to a congregation of real believers, sinners, off-key choirs? (Sorry about that Clayton.) Sweaty and homely people, people they don't like but are

supposed to love, ordinary pastors who preach grace along with calls to discipleship, pleas for stewardship that don't come well oiled? Why never, why should they put up with that?

"Since the electronic church...he says...you remind me at least preaches Christ and thus may do some good, let it be. Let its members pay for it. But let the church catch on to what is going on and go its own way undistracted by the offers of cheap grace or the language of the cross without the bearing of the cross."

I think radio and television is a great way to reach people as long as you have something to say when you're on there and you don't compromise yourself so that your message is meaningless. But on the other hand, it isn't the real church, is it? And it doesn't really reach out a hand and put it around a broken heart. And I never could get too excited about mailing in my prayer request and having some guy tell me he's going into a praying tower to lay his hands on all 17 thousand of them. It doesn't really do a whole lot for me. If I want to have somebody pray, I want to have somebody that breathes and somebody that doesn't have to pray for 17 thousand other people's requests.

The great evangelistic agency in the world today is the church of Jesus Christ. It isn't even Campus Crusade or Billy Graham or anybody on television. It is the local church. If God wanted to reach this community, the best plan He could have is to put a whole lot of Christian right in the middle of it and say, "Go get them." Cause we're real people and we're going to touch them where they live. God, help us to do that.

I praise God for our evangelism training, for our people who go out and share Christ. I just get so excited at baptismal services when people come to Christ and they tell me they were led to Christ by the guy who works next to them, or the lady at the office or some neighbor or somebody that came to the door. Oh, beloved, we ought to double this church every six months.

Listen, I believe Satan attacks us in this area. Make us lazy, get us so messed up with our kids just trying to get here that we could never bother to bring anybody with us, or make sure everything is such a mess in the morning that we just can hardly get organized ourselves to be here, or to get our lives so full of other things that we can't give ourselves to investing in the life of someone who doesn't know Christ...and I have just as much a struggle with this as you do. I think Satan attacks us in that way and he'd love us to get all ingrown and all theologically fat headed and lose our love for the lost. God, help me if I can't sit on a hillside and look over the city of Los Angeles and weep as Jesus wept.

I believe Satan is attacking us in another area, the eighth area. I believe he wants us to forsake our devotion to the family. I believe he wants to forsake...us to forsake our devotion to the family. One of our pastors came to me tonight in our prayer time as we were praying before we came in, and he said, "John, I don't know how you handle this kind of a thing but I can't handle it in my heart at all." He said, "I'm going through it right now with three or four of the couples in our class whose marriages

are on the rocks, whose families are falling apart." A man came to me this morning and said, "I want to introduce you to my friend," his life is all falling apart after 20 years of marriage, his whole family is coming apart, can't control his children. It's a real disaster.

In our Monday-night meeting we had to speak of a couple in our church that decided they didn't want to be married anymore and they went their own way and there was terrible sin involved. And still is.

I'm telling you, people, I have never seen in my life anything like the attack on the family today. Do you know something? Just the morals of the young people in our society are so unspeakable and it's a drowning that they're undergoing through the records, and the movies, and the television.

Television is nothing but what you could call "soft pornography." It is a drowning in this stuff. And I'm telling you, from the music that I hear coming out of the world, you could take about 95 percent of those records and smash them and do everybody a favor. And sometimes the worst words come in the nicest packages. Subtly, families are being devastated. Divorce...you know, here we are in the church, here we teach the Word of God, here are people who have heard the series on the family and have studied the Bible and they just walk away.

We find...we marry couples and three or four months later we find out they have separated. And somebody has run off with somebody else. Just constantly going on. I've never seen anything like it, never. The family is being attacked in so many, many areas.

I just jotted down a few. First, the heterosexual nature of the family is being attacked. I can't believe what's going on in the name of homosexual rights. Homosexuals don't have any rights because they're sinful. Does being a vile sinner give you certain rights? Maybe we should have rights for murderers and thieves and robbers and everybody else. How did that get to be a minority? That's not a minority, that's a sin. Homosexual rights? That's an attack on the solidarity of the heterosexual family. Does that ever bring chaos! Homosexual teachers, homosexual parents and now homosexuals adopting children, homosexuals being appointed to judgeships and high-ranking positions in our own state, all this does is attack the heterosexual nature of the family.

The headship of the man is being attacked, isn't it? Sure. I mean, this is more than ever in our life time. The headship of the man is being attacked. I mean, the Women's Lib Movement is just beginning. We think it's bad, we haven't really seen anything. The Bible teaches the headship of the man, not because he's better but because it's necessary to have a leader and a follower. The submission of the woman is being attacked. Women are being forced out of the home. You just watch the commercials on television and you just watch how many of them show the liberated woman.

I watched one not long ago where both of them were having a difficult time getting to work on time in the morning until they came up with some new product. And have you seen the one, you know,

about the woman and she can do this and she can do that and she can do this and go out and earn \$50,000 a year to boot. And she can get the breakfast and she can dress the kids and ta-da-ta-da, you know.

The fact of the matter is, that isn't true. The Bible says a woman is to be a keeper at home. When I said that here at Grace Church, I thought the sky fell in. When I said that women ought not to work but they ought to go home and take care of their families, you would have thought I stepped out of outer space. All I was doing was quoting from Titus.

And then we're finding an attack on the submission of children. And now we're in to this big deal about children's rights. And then there's an attack on the right to punish your children or to chasten your children or to spank your children. I would predict that in the next few years that right will be removed by federal law as it has been in Sweden.

They're questioning whether we have the right to teach our children moral values or spiritual truths or to give them a preference in religion.

And then maybe something that's so fearful you can't hardly speak of it with agony, the family is being attacked even at the right of children to be born. I suppose the ones we know about, there have been between six and seven million abortions, that's murder, pure and simple, murder. That's what the Bible says. And now you can even take a special test to find out the sex of your child and if you prefer a male and it's a female, you can have it aborted. That's no different than the Romans. When the child was born if it was a male the thumb went up, if it was a female the thumb went down and they drowned it. Children don't even have the right to be born. What a conundrum that the very children who are supposed to have so many rights don't even have the right to be born. The family is under attack.

We've never had so much divorce. We've never had so much adultery. I've never seen so much separation. I've never seen so much hanky-panky in marriages where people can't decide whether to stay together and they go home to mother and back and forth and back and forth. I've heard the craziest things, "The Lord told me to leave my husband." Premarital sex, just to give you some indication of the agony of this, the album we did on the family has the biggest response of anything we have ever done in the history of our tape ministry by far because people are so desperate in this area. Frankly, people, when the family goes, society goes. Is that true? It's true. And we are watching the erosion of American society. And I'll tell you another thing. If the families in the church start breaking up, the church will disintegrate. It is predicated on God's design for the family. And we're going to boldly fight for the right of the family to be biblical and they may have to haul me away kicking and screaming on that point but I'm not going to bend on it. I think the man ought to be the head of the house and the woman ought to be submissive and the man ought to take care of provision and the woman ought to go home and take care of the kids. And that's the priority. And I

believe that God has designed the children to be submissive to their parents and I believe that God has designed heterosexuality to be the basic physical characteristic of marriage and life sexually in this world. And I think that's the way it is. And I'll not compromise that.

And, of course, it may come to the place where in our own church if we aren't willing to stop speaking against homosexuality, we won't have a right to exist under the laws of our state as a corporation but that's okay, we don't need to be a corporation to be a church. I believe our staff is concerned about this more perhaps than any other one thing on a day-to-day basis. And that's what we pray so much about. It's a heartache, people, to see the attack on the family. Will you make a covenant with you and your wife? Will you renew the vow of the wife of your youth as Malachi put it, and reaffirm the standard for your family?

Another way to destroy Grace Church in addition to these is to make us substitute...watch this one...form for reality and forsake a willingness to change and innovate. Now this is kind of a touchy thing, I just want to hit on it briefly. Four and a half years ago I told you that a mark of an effective church was a willingness to change. The seven last words of the church are, "We've never done it that way before." Whenever you get the form set in concrete, you're in real trouble. I mean, if there wasn't a Sunday-morning service, would you still be a Christian? Maybe that's the bottom line.

We become so identified with forms and unless we are willing to change, unless we have a reality not a form, we miss it. And we can have our evangelical forms just as much as anybody else.

I talked to a lady at New Year's and she said, "Do you have..." or Christmas eve, she said, "Do you have Christmas Eve candlelight communion?" I said no. She said, "We do in our church." She named the church. It's not a church, it's a stone quarry, there's no life there, it's deader than a doornail, has been for 40 years. Last time I heard about it, somebody slipped vodka in the junior-high dance. That's not a church. The pastor doesn't believe in the Bible or the deity of Jesus Christ, as far as I know, at least in the past...or is questionable. She says, "Well we have that."

I said, "You do?"

She says, "Yes, we've always had it."

"You've always had it?" I said, "Do you go?"

She says, "Oh no...not many people go but we always have it."

Fortunately they don't go. So many people worship the form and don't even know the reality. Some people would literally collapse if there were no Sunday-morning service. You know, I'll be honest with you, I've been raised in a church, really. I mean, I have...by the growing up in a church I have the

largest quarterly collection you've ever seen. I've got a quarterly from every year of my life in Sunday school. By the time I was 15 I had about eight zipper Bibles they kept giving me every time I graduated. I had little stars and turkeys stuck all over my head all through my youth. Actually had to find new areas because I was getting scars where they kept sticking all of these. I had stuff pinned all over my clothes, ruined most of the coats my mother bought me from memorizing verses or whatever.

And I'll tell you the way it is for me now. Sundays, whether I like it or not, has become a routine. That if I can't get to a Sunday-night service somewhere, I get withdrawal. I have a real problem with that. So I understand that mentality. It's so easy to substitute a form for reality. The institutional church so easily canonizes its forms.

It's exactly what the church in Sardis did in Revelation chapter 3 verse 1. It had forms. It had a name. It had works. But it was dead, no life.

You know, the buildings and the services in a church can become a structural pope. And your Christianity can have its beginning and its ending when you enter that situation. Spurgeon said, "Suppose there were no church buildings, no chapels, no sermons and no assemblies for worship, would you be a Christian?" Good question.

Now I don't know what the future has. But you better have something real enough to change if the change has to come, right? We may have to have another service on Friday night or on Sunday night...or rather on Saturday night. We may have to do a lot of things to change, we don't know. We don't know what God has for us in the future. But we have to have a reality that doesn't depend on forms. And if you can't make a change in the form, then you have made what is changeable into something that is changeless and you've missed it.

Let me illustrate it to you. Turn to Matthew 15, verse 1, "Then came to Jesus scribes and Pharisees of Jerusalem saying, Why do Your disciples transgress the tradition of the elders?" Oh I love that. That is so revealing. Why do Your disciples break the rules of tradition? Now where did tradition come from? They had invented it. It wasn't from God. It was the tradition of the elders. "For they don't wash their hands when they eat." Now they weren't talking about just washing up so you didn't contaminate your food. They were talking about ceremonial washings that the Jews had invented. Why don't they do that? Don't they know that's the tradition?

Jesus said, "Well why do you transgress the commandment of God with your tradition?" Oh, what an answer. Why do you break the commandment of God with your tradition. And immediately they would have said, "Oh, what are you saying?" And then He said to them, "For God said, Honor your father and mother, and he that curses father or mother, let him die the death." God's law says you better take care of your mother and father, but you say, "Whosoever shall say to his father or his mother, it is a gift, by whatsoever thou mightiest be profited by me and honor not his father or his

mother, thus he made the commandment of God of no effect by your tradition."

Now what did they do? The commandment of God said to take care of your mother and father. So old mother and old father would come poking along and they would say, "You know, we're all out of resources. We have some real needs." And those who were playing pious games with the tradition of the elders would say, "Oh, you know, we would love to meet your need but, you see, all of this money is Corban, it is a gift and we have vowed it to God, that's our tradition. And so it's not available to you unless you want to lay a claim to something given to God."

Boy, what intimidation, huh? "And the Lord says, that's no divine principle. In your stupid, self-righteous, phony supposed gift to God, you're really saying I'm not interested in meeting your needs and you're breaking a commandment of God with your tradition." Verse 7, "You hypocrites." And then verse 9 sums it up, "For in vain they worship Me...why?...teaching for doctrines the commandments of men."

Listen, people, we better always know the difference between what is divine and what is human. And forms are human. You can't make something sacred out of this form, this is just accommodating our society in our culture and our time and our need.

I remember some time ago when some of the men came to me and said, "You know what we need in our church? We need to reorganize the whole church."

And I kind of swallowed. "We need to reorganize the whole church?"

"Yep, God's not going to bless unless we reorganize this whole church."

So I thought about it a second, I said, "You know what you'd have if you reorganized the whole church? You'd have all the people who are committed still committed, all the people who are serving still serving, all the people who are loving still loving, all the people who are worshipping still worshipping, all the people who are evangelizing still evangelizing and all the people who aren't doing anything still not doing anything only in a different form, that's all." Because the form doesn't do a thing on the inside.

Now conversely, people will say, "Well, you know, the problem with Grace Church is it's in a building." They've actually said that to me, it's in a building, you should never have this building. What does that have to do with it? And people have said, "Well, if it was just in a home, that would be the key." My response to that is, "You go ahead and buy the home and we'll all come over."

What are you saying? There's nothing sacred about the form. There's nothing sacred about this form and there's nothing sacred about another form. That is not the issue. We have a building because we

had to put a wall around a bunch of people who wanted to sit down and worship the Lord. Don't ever get trapped in the forms. That's...that's a deception. You don't change anything by changing the form. That's like saying, "You know, if we really want to win the war with the devil, what we need to do is change the color of our uniforms." That isn't going to do anything, change the color of your uniforms.

Satan wants people to substitute form for reality and become blind to what really matters. Beloved, I don't know what the future has for us but I hope what you have is real and that you're not preoccupied with the forms, they come and go and they're different all over the world. I've sat with Christians outside under a tree and worshiped. I've sat with them in a little humble simple home. I've sat on splintered benches in a little church in Brazil. I've been with Christians on the streets in South America. I've been a lot of places in a lot of different situations with a lot of different Christians and I never found that the shape of the building or the size of the building or the angle of the pew or whether I was in a house or a church or a barn never had a whole lot to do with what was going on in my heart. You have to keep that in mind.

And then again, another age-old ploy of Satan against God's people, and I want you to stay with me cause I'm coming to the climax and I want you to hear it, is for Satan to cause us to abandon living by faith. That's number ten. I told you four and a half years ago that if we were to see God bless this church we would have to live by faith. We would have to stretch our faith. It wasn't long after that that we began the project of building this building. And we determined that we wouldn't start one thing, digging a hole or anything, and I mean there was a big hole here once, we're sitting in it now, we wouldn't start doing that, we figured this place would cost us with the office building a million and a half, this auditorium would cost \$850 thousand completely furnished and that's what it...that's what it cost. It's not the Crystal Cathedral but then it didn't cost 20 times as much either. But it gets us all in, doesn't it? And so we determined that for \$850 thousand we could build this building and then we could add an office wing for \$750 thousand so we could have 25 or so offices to minister to people and all of the other things that go on. And we determined that before we did anything we would have \$750 thousand and then we would believe God for the remainder. And I want you to know, if you've forgotten, that the very first Sunday we ever met in this building, the money came in to make the final payment and that was totally paid for the day we walked in this building...this auditorium was paid for.

We believed God for it. We stretched people's faith. You know, Israel got the grasshopper complex, you remember that? They went into the land and they came out and said they're giants and we're grasshoppers, we're going to get crushed if we go in there. They didn't live by faith except for Joshua and Caleb and they said, "Let's go, God's on our side they can't possibly resist us." And we have to have that...

I remember a few years ago in...I went to the Mission's Committee, I think it was the second year I was here, and I said, "You know, we need more missionaries." And some dear person said to me,

"We don't have anymore money." I said, "Well we don't need anymore money cause we don't have anybody to give it to. Why would the Lord give us a whole lot of more money if we didn't have anywhere to put it? So why don't we get some missionaries and then ask God to give us some money for them?"

"Oh," they said, "let's see about that." So they said, "Maybe you could find a couple of good missionaries." So I went out and examined what was available and found a couple of missionaries. And you know what? The Lord brought in some money. And then we began to see that God provides for the things He's a part of. And if we pray and seek His face and His will and we begin to do what He calls us to do, that God makes provision for that. And we've never found that that's been a problem. Money is never problem. When we believe that God is in something and step out by faith, it's glorious to see Him fulfill it, isn't it? That's the only way. I know there are churches who say, "Well, we're not going to do anything until we have every red cent. We're living by sight." Congratulations. We walk by faith and not by sight. That doesn't mean presumption, there are a lot of places where a pastor said we're going to live by faith and he led the whole congregation off the end of the pier. But that's now what we're talking about. We're talking about where there is a resolution based upon the will of God and we step out in faith believing God.

There has to be a stretching of faith, people. We can become possessive and protective. I look at our radio thing. It's amazing to me how that radio program...I think we're on 37 stations and now the 1150 here locally has put us on at 7 o'clock every night free as a bonus. And other cities are taking our program and saying, "Look, just send us whatever money comes in and we'll just work it like that. We want the teaching of the Word." And we just kind of stuck our neck out. We didn't know anything. And we said, "Well, the tape ministry has a little surplus because God has blessed the tape ministry and the tape ministry can put it in the radio and then we'll just get it all started." And God has increased what is available in the tape ministry again and again. And they keep lowering the prices and more money keeps coming in.

I said, "How come if we only had this many tapes," I think 350,000 tapes or something, "we got nearly \$500 thousand?" And they said, "Because people sent us more money than we need." And I believe that's God's way of helping us launch the radio ministry. It's amazing when we make the commitment how God makes the provision.

People, let me tell you something. We've been praying a long time about a school and we stepped out on faith in starting a school next September and God is providing. And just at Christmas alone, you dear people gave over \$20,000 for the first phase of what we want to do in that school. And God will meet our need, I believe it, I've seen Him do it so many times. We're talking about an education building here because I believe God's going to grow the seminary and God's going to grow our Bible Institute and we're going to have a place here where young people and old people alike can come and learn the Word of God and feed on it, a place that will be a testimony and a monument to the

grace of God in this community. And I believe if God wants us to have it, He'll provide it. And money is no object. After all, you can only spend that stuff here and now, you might as well use all you can even if you have a debt, you can leave it for the Antichrist to pay, we'll all be gone anyway.

I guess I...you didn't know I thought that, did you? I guess I ask myself again and again this question...what am I believing God for that only God can do so that when He does it He gets all the glory? Do you live at all like that? I mean, are you believing God for something that only He could do so that when He does it you can praise His name? Oh, beloved, let's live by faith. Don't ever lose the adventure. Don't ever give up the risk. Let's not get protective. Let's not want to sit on everything. Let's invest it in eternity in the glorious adventure of saying, "God, we see this as Your will and knowing that You alone can provide the resource we move out in faith waiting to see."

I'll never forget the day we moved in here and we knew that debt was paid, that is an unforgettable time of joy, the thrill still lingers in my heart and the glory to the Lord. I remember when...I think that was the first time that I ever sang, "To God be the glory," and I never have sung it with the same feeling that I sang it that day because it was to Him. I remember when we first started and a young couple came into my office and they said, "We saved up a thousand dollars to start our marriage but because we know that this is God's will to build this auditorium, here it is," and they dumped it on the desk. I remember a man said, wrote me a little note that came along the row and it just said, "Go check in front of your office door." And I went in front of my office door and there was a paper sack from a market and it was a Safeway bag and I thought..."Well, somebody left me some apples," and I reached down to pick them up and I couldn't get it off the ground, it was absolutely filled with silver bars. It was all of his life savings reduced to silver and given to the Lord and didn't even want anybody to know who it was. I still don't know who. God always provides.

One of the handicapped people in our church has recently sent \$3,000, a handicapped person, to purchase the van for the Grace handicapped people. That's the kind of thing that thrills your heart, isn't it? That's the adventure of faith of saying, "We believe our handicapped people need a little van and we're going to believe God for it because He's laid it on our heart." And little by little God just keeps providing. Clayton said to me the other day, he said, "You know, I...I feel we need some new microphones," and I don't know anything about that, just as long as this one works, I'm happy. But he said, "We need some new microphones, you know." And he said, "I just kind of shared that." And I went into my office today, and there was a thousand dollars piled up on his desk, he doesn't even know where it came from, I guess...believing the Lord was supplying his need.

God has done this all through the years, people, and we'll not cease to live by faith. That's part of the adventure.

There's a corollary to that and an eleventh point and then two final ones...bear with me. The eleventh one that I believe Satan is attacking is a spirit of sacrifice...a spirit of sacrifice. Satan wants us to

distrust God. Satan wants us to pull back. He wants us to live in fear. He wants us to never step out in faith. And he wants to kill us by robbing us of the spirit of sacrifice. He'd love you not to give the way you ought to give in the church because you're afraid you won't have enough to pay the bills. He'd love for you never to live by faith but always to live by sight and figure everything out so you just make sure...and then you just don't have enough for the Lord. He'd love you to live that way...Satan would. And Satan would love you to abandon the spirit of sacrifice.

Oh listen, Grace Church has always been known as a church that sacrificed. I hope that's true in your life. Somebody told me the other day that the average giving per person in Grace Church per week is \$6.00. Kind of sad, isn't it? In a way. Oh, I don't know, maybe you're giving it somewhere else or maybe the Lord isn't asking you to give it any more than that because we don't have something for you to give toward, we soon will when the school begins and the new building begins. But, you know, I wonder if we know the meaning of sacrifice. I wonder if we really do. If we ever lose the spirit of sacrifice, there's a death blow. You know, Laodicea...hauntingly does the Lord say to Laodicea, "You're rich and you are increased with goods and I will spew you out of My mouth."

Beloved, when you lose the spirit of sacrifice, the fire is gone, the zeal is melted away. Oh, don't let Satan kill this church by the fatal disease of selfishness. David said, "I will not give the Lord that which costs me nothing. I think about our radio program all around the country, people asking for us to come on, we can't because at this point God hasn't provided the funds. We would like to be able to have land to build a school somewhere else but we just don't have the resource for that. I wonder if we really know the meaning of sacrifice. There are people in your life, people around you who have very little, are you meeting their needs? The other night I watched a news program, 20/20. And it showed people who live in America in substandard housing where they cannot be protected from the elements, cardboard houses and houses with collapsed roofs and houses where there's no heating at all. And these people are dying because of the elements, most of them very old people. And so the government has started some kind of a program to help them, only the program is a total disaster. The money is all consumed in bureaucracy and technicalities and the people continue to die. And I kept saying to myself, "Why is the government doing that? Where is the church? Where are we? Why aren't Christians in line adopting children, taking in foster children orphans? Why aren't we carrying the load of the needy? Where are we when the widows and the single parents and the people who are ill need us? When did we ever get off giving that stuff to the government?"

What about your life? Are you sacrificial in your investment with God of time and money? I'm not talking about gimmicks. I just have no place for gimmicks for giving. We're not going to give away buttons, badges, bricks or anything else. We're not going to put your foot on a plaque on the wall. We're not going to put your hands in the concrete. We're not going to give you a big plaque that says, "I just lost my reward." We're not going to do that. What we are going to do is just ask you between the Lord to continue to be sacrificial and God bless you, many of you have been sacrificial. But there's God's work to be done across this world...across this world. And there are many widows

giving their mite and there are many who have much who give much, but all of us need to sacrifice. Like the Macedonians, 2 Corinthians 8, out of their deep poverty they gave abundantly.

Satan hits us in this area. We're living in an affluent society. We get mad when we face the fact that we won't get any gas to fill our Beltz(?) Fire 8's, you know, that consume fuel down the highway. And I look in some driveways and when you've got teen aged kids, or whatever, there's a fleet. And we worry about that. And we're so...our perspective is so lost in so many cases.

You see, it isn't what you have. Oh if God's blessed you with cars and houses and lands, wonderful. It's what you do with what you have...whether you're selfless about it and sacrificial. I know Satan wants to hit us in these areas.

Now let me remind you of them and then I'm going to close with two things. I believe we have to make a commitment to a plurality of godly leaders, a high standard of holiness, spiritual objectives, mature discipling, an active ministering people, an intense loving, caring spirit, an aggressive confrontive evangelism, a devotion to the family, a willingness to change the forms, a stretching confident faith and a spirit of sacrifice. But none of those things will ever come to pass unless there are two other things and here Satan attacks.

First, a primary emphasis on worshiping God. Did you get that? Beloved, we cannot lose that. There must be a primary emphasis on worshiping God. We must be a church committed to the glory of God. When we come together on the Lord's day, our hearts should be filled with praise. We should be worshiping and adoring His blessed name. We should be offering Him prayer and praise continually. We are not a church just stuck on evangelism and naming the name of Christ, we are not a church just looking for gifts of the Spirit and ecstatic experiences. We are a church devoted to the fullness of the godhead in its trinity. We are devoted to worshiping, praising, glorifying, confessing God.

You know, I go back to the truths of glorifying God that I preached some years back and say that those in my life are the most important truths I ever learned. When I learned what it was to glorify God, when I did what David said, "Set the Lord always before me," my whole life fell into place. We cannot cease to be a worshiping church. We can never become a church like so many where the main emphasis is its program, or the main emphasis is its theology, or the main emphasis is its preacher, or the main emphasis is its music, or the main emphasis is its facility...the main emphasis here is our God and ever and always it must be so.

You know why? Because if the main emphasis is anything less than that, you'll compromise. If the main emphasis is your program, then whatever works you'll do. If the main emphasis is your preacher, then whenever he preaches, whatever he preaches is okay. The main emphasis must be the glory of God and that leaves room for no compromise at all.

And then finally, Satan hits us hard here but we will not step back. Satan attacks us in the area of strong Bible preaching and teaching. People, everything else hangs on this. Worshiping God embodies the concept of prayer and praise. But that has to take a second place to teaching because you don't know how to pray and you don't know how to praise unless you know God. True? And the great final thing to which we must be committed as a church is the absolute truth of the Word of God. And it is always being undermined whether it's these people in the back room trying to disrupt baptism and draw away disciples unto themselves after their terrible satanic heresy, or whether it's somebody saying, "Well, you know, I had enough of Bible teaching, I've taken about all I can, I'd like to have something else for a while," whatever it is or in between those two extremes, we will not abandon the absolute heartbeat of the church which is to preach the Word, to be instant in season and out of season, because that is the divine mandate.

I told you a few weeks ago that my little boy said to me, "Are you going to retire, Daddy?" And I'll never retire. Retire from preaching? I'll probably be playing a tape at my funeral. I don't know anything else and I don't care to know anything else either...than to preach and teach the Word of God. And listen, I cherish the godly men that Christ has given this church who teach His Word. And you should cherish them, too.

Do you forget? Do you forget what a richness there is in this church in the teaching of the Word of God? Don't ever forget that. Some of us ought to go away for a while just so we'd know what we have when we have to face the fact that it isn't there. We will not allow any subtle effort to water down the pulpit. We will not substitute human opinion. We will not make this a place where we just dialogue about ditties in our society. We will unhesitatingly and uncompromisingly preach the Word of God. This is the absolute. The Word is what puts it all together. If God has ever done anything at this church, it isn't me and it isn't you, it's this...isn't it? His Word. If you're still attached to me or any other human teacher and you haven't made the transition to see that we're only instruments of the Word, then you haven't grown as far as we'd like you to grow. Make that transfer to His Word, that's the source.

I have a simple calling in life. I don't know how to run a church. I don't know how to run a big organization. I don't know how to operate public relations and publicity. The only thing I know is that in Acts chapter 6 and verse 4 there was given a mandate and it was this, to give myself continually to prayer and the ministry of the Word, and that's all I know. But I have seen that if I'm committed to that and the other godly men here are committed to that, look what happens. We will never diminish the centrality of the preaching of the Word of God. I've had other preachers say to me, I got a letter from one well-known one in this area who said, "MacArthur, your problem is you worship the Bible instead of Christ." Well I don't worship the Bible but I sure love it a lot. I sure love it a lot because it is the thing that gives me Christ. And so we will not hesitate to teach it and to believe it.

I close with this. Never before, as I said, have I felt the power of Satan so strongly. I felt so much pressure in my life, people, I can't express to you, that I can...I sometimes say to myself, "How will I ever prepare my message? I don't have time." And Satan crowds in on me and I look...I say, "I've got to do Daniel and I've got to do Matthew." And, you know, I tell you everything I know on Sunday and I start from zero on Monday and I start digging and I say things come into my life and how am I going to make it, how am I going to make it? And I have to go maybe long and read at night and put it all together and finally the last minute on Saturday it finally all comes together. And, you know, more times than not, people, I don't even know what it's going to be like until I say it. I've just poured it all into my heart. And I see more and more. You say, "Well I figured that..." and the more I study the easier it will get. But now it seems like I have to fight tooth and nail to get the time for the Word and I want you to know that I'm going to stay in there and fight cause it's what I have to do...it's what I have to do because that's what God's called me to do.

Satan has attacked us in all these areas. But you want to know something? God is greater than Satan. Amen? And I close with this great word from our Lord. "I will build My church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it." Let's pray.

Father, I thank You for these dear people. O God, You've called us in this series of messages to a reaffirmation of the things we know to be true. Now, Lord, help us to go out and live them. God, thank You for this great church, this dear, blessed, beloved church that feeds my soul and my life. Thank You for all that it is to all of us and may we know, Lord, that it is only as strong as its weakest member and so may our lives come into harmony with Your Word and Your will and Your way that we may represent Jesus Christ in the world. Build Your church, Lord, using us as frail instruments of clay to Your glory in Christ's name. Amen.

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