

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

The Anatomy of the Church: The Internal Systems, Part 1

Scripture: Selected Scriptures

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Last Lord's Day I began to talk to you from out of my heart along the subject that I called "The Anatomy of the Church." I shared with you at that time that I feel that Grace Community Church stands at a very crucial point in its history. God has done great things. I think there are yet greater things ahead. I've never in my lifetime been more committed to this church and this ministry and what God would have from me here. I'm excited about the future. And yet I know that there is an enemy who would want to thwart that; and I know that we have a spiritual battle on our hands that is going to rage hotter than ever in days ahead. And so I just felt the need to sort of depart from the continued series in Matthew and kind of let you into my heart a little bit and share with you where I think our church really is, and what we need to reaffirm. And I'm so thankful for the response from last Sunday. I received a lot of cards and some letters and phone calls and encouraging responses from people in person who said, "I want to reaffirm my commitment to the Lord, to this church, to uphold your ministry." And that means so much. I'm always grateful that you people respond to God's Word and to the heart of the pastor or the shepherd who brings it to you.

I want to continue what we started last time, and, and I guess we could say that this is sort of a brief bit of spiritual archeology. Some of you have come here, and you don't see the foundation. You weren't here in the years of building. You don't really understand what's underneath everything, and so what I'm trying to do is dig up a little bit of foundation for you and let you see the basics of what this ministry is really committed to. And in order to help us see that foundation, to kind of dig down and find out what's really at the bottom of Grace Church, I, I, I wanted to borrow Paul's wonderful analogy of the body. And we're talking about the anatomy of the church, and I suggested that there are four features of the body that we want to look at: the skeleton, the internal systems, the muscles, and the flesh. That's a rather simplified perspective, but it'll serve us well, I think.

We said last time that the church must have a skeleton. That gives it form. That gives it a framework. That allows it to stand. That is the non-negotiable, substantial, basic foundation upon which everything else hangs and through which everything else moves. And we said that our non-negotiable foundational principles are these five: a high view of God, the absolute authority of Scripture, doctrinal clarity, personal holiness, and an understanding of spiritual authority. Those are key things. We must continue to lift up God, to exalt His blessed, holy name. We must continue to, to prioritize the Word of God, to make it everything, to study it, to preach it, to teach it. We must also be committed to draw from it doctrine that is clear, precise, and applicable to life. We must also pursue, with all of our strength in the Holy Spirit: holiness, virtue, godliness, righteousness; and we must understand

spiritual authority.

There is a great responsibility in being a spiritual leader and being one who follows those who lead. And so if, from time to time, you hear me speak about God and Scripture and doctrine and holiness and authority, you'll understand that I have to keep putting in the, the, the structure, the skeleton, the framework. And so these are themes to which you return again and again and again. And sometimes, if it sounds like the same sermon, it may be; but most of the time, it may not be. If it is once in a while, I always try to yell in different places, so it looks different on the surface.

But it's just that there are these things that have to be reaffirmed, so that, as we saw last time where Peter said, "I want you to remember those things so that, after I am gone, you will still remember them." You will still remember them. It's the same thing Paul had in his heart when he wrote to the Philippians and said, "I'm glad for what I see when I'm with you, but I'm even more glad for what I see when I'm absent from you, that you're working out your salvation with fear and trembling." I don't know how long the Lord'll give me or how long I'll be in this place. But, but the greatest satisfaction I could ever have would be to be gone, if that is in God's purpose, and to look back, if that is possible from wherever I might be—and I don't know if I can look back from heaven—and to say, "They're going on, and they are still committed to the things that they were committed to in my presence."

In order to help us to reaffirm those foundational things, we've been re, sort of structuring ourselves. Now, I believe that it's essential in the life of the church that these *nonnegotiables* be emphasized, which is to say that they will be a part of the preaching ministry again and again and again and again. Secondly, they must be a part of the teaching ministry. If you teach a, a fellowship group or a flock or a Bible study or a children's class or a young peoples' Bible class or whatever, wherever you are, if you're *disciplining* somebody, these are the things you have to go back to, to continue to put the skeleton in to have the foundation, to have the form that is necessary for the body to be what Christ would have it to be. And so we must preach it and teach it, and then also, example is key. We must model it. There must be a demonstration of commitment to these things; not only in what we say, but in the life we live. I have to be just as committed to personal holiness, doctrinal clarity, this, the authority of Scripture and so forth in my living as I am in my preaching, or it'll all get lost. And so we're committed to these things.

Now, that leads me to a second category, the internal systems. And I want to talk about them this morning and next week—and we'll see if I can finish even in two weeks—but I want to talk about the internal systems. I believe that the church must have flowing through it certain spiritual attitudes. A physical body has organs and fluids that flow through and cause that body to be able to be alive and function; and so we are not only a skeleton. A skeleton is not alive. It gives form, but it isn't life. There has to be a flowing through of certain spiritual attitudes; and that is what I see as the internal systems of the church.

The, the pastoral endeavor, the, the goal of the elders, the goal of leaders in the church is to generate in the hearts of people certain spiritual attitudes. We're not just trying to get you to do certain things. We're not just going to hit you with, "You need to do this and do that and do this," and so. But rather to generate the proper kind of spiritual attitudes which, themselves, will motivate proper kind of behavior. You see, you can do the right thing outwardly and have a bad attitude. But if you have a good attitude, you'll do the right thing outwardly coming out of a good attitude. And so we work on the fruit of the Spirit, if you will, the internal motivation, the internal attitude.

Sometimes young men go into a pastorate, and they come to a church, and they see that the church maybe isn't organized the right way, and maybe they don't see all the things they would like to see going on, so their temptation invariably is to reorganize the church. And sometimes they'll call or talk to me and say, "Boy, we want to, we want to get elders, and we want to reorganize this and reorganize that." And I often say to them, "You know what you're going to have when you reorganize the church? You're going to have the same people with the same attitudes in a different structure. That's all, and the problem's going to be they're not going to know why you're changing the structure; and it might be very difficult to change." I remember when I first came to Grace, I had a whole new idea for how to run the Sunday School. This is about the first month I'm here, I get this brainstorm. And I wrote the whole thing out and presented it to the education committee and they unanimously turned it down. They said, "Who are you, kid? We've been here a long time. Where did you come from? Prove yourself." In effect. Years later, they came up with that same system. It was just a question of developing the spiritual attitudes that brought about the right kind of responses. On the other hand, you can not worry about the structure of the church. And if you build in the right spiritual attitude, structure has a way of taking care of itself because Spirit-controlled people are going to do Spirit-led things. And they're going to find themselves moving toward conformity to the biblical pattern of the church.

So we have to have an emphasis in the church on attitudes. We have to work on what's going on inside of you. We're not interested in just getting you to behave in a certain way. Make sure you give your money. Make sure you show up Sunday morning, Sunday night, Wednesday night. Make sure you pray five hours a week or whatever. Make sure you read your Bible every day; devoted in a dutiful way. That isn't the idea. Now, those are not the approach. We're not approaching things on a legalistic or superficial basis. But the effort of the ministry's always been to generate attitudes; and sometimes you fight a battle because there are some people who don't come along with right attitudes. And you want to say to them, "Do it anyway, even with your bad attitude." But you have to back off of that, because you don't want to play into the hands of the satisfaction that comes from legalism, and so we work on attitudes. And over the years, these are the attitudes that I have been concerned to see in the hearts and lives of my own, my own personal life, as well as all of the people here.

First of all, and foremost, is obedience; an attitude of obedience. Now, this is the overarching attitude of all attitudes. This says, "If God says something, I do it." This is that no compromising spirit that we were talking about when we looked into the book of Daniel a little bit, a few months ago in our communion service. This is no compromise. I mean if God says it, that's it. It is not debatable. It isn't something you argue about. You do it. Obedience: That is the overarching attitude. And so week after week, month after month, year after year we have just kept pounding the Word of God into the minds and hearts of all of us with the implication, "This is what God says, and you must respond. You must do it for the glory of God and for your own blessedness and the salvation of souls and the example to other Christians."

For all those reasons, we obey, because it's right and it glorifies God, because it puts us in the place of blessing, because it allows us to be in-filled with the Spirit so that we can reach others and set an example for those who watch us to see how we live. Obedience. You say, "Well, it seems pretty obvious." Sure it does, because you were saved by affirming the lordship of Jesus Christ, right? And that simply is saying, "You're in charge," right? "I'm going to follow. You're Lord, I'm servant." "Why do you call Me Master and do not the things I say," Jesus says. "I mean that doesn't make any sense. Don't call Me Lord and then don't obey Me. So if I am Lord, then that means you do what I say, right?" Right, that's obvious. That's what He meant in the gospel of Matthew, chapter 7 when He said, "It's a narrow road and a narrow gate and a narrow way." The, the way is narrow, because it's confined by the will of God and the law of God and the Word of God. And so we came in affirming Jesus as Lord; Romans 10:9 and 10. We came in submitting ourselves to His lordship; and, basically, that is to a life of obedience; and so that's the first and foremost attitude.

Phil Johnson was eager to share with me this week down at the radio ministry a tape that he'd received from one of our listeners who wrote and said that—or, no, he sent a, I guess he sent a letter along with the tape, but he—his tape was basically communicating his heart's desire. For ten minutes he'd talk about how he listened to the program and appreciated the study of the Bible and whatever, whatever. And then he went into his problem. He had a lot of sins in his life the Lord was working with, but one thing in particular he was curious about and wondered what our view was, and that was this: that he didn't feel he ever in his life had a normal feeling toward women. He didn't seem to feel as men should feel toward women, but he did feel very strongly toward farm animals. That's right, farm animals, and he wondered what we thought about that, and he said that he thought that the, that was not a problem. He didn't feel any guilt when he was doing things like that, and he thought the Lord was sort of refining him in other areas, and that area was not a problem.

So a letter was sent back to him, four pages long, expressing to him that it indeed was a problem. In fact, if he were living in the Old Testament, he would've been dead, because if a man lies with a beast, he's killed. And went on to express in kind terms that God doesn't compartmentalize life and say, "These sins I'm going to deal with. These I'm not too worried about." All sin is an affront to His

holy name, and so all kinds of Scripture was sent back to the guy. And then we received another tape, and Phil played this tape for me, and here's a quote right off the tape: "I don't think anybody understands. Christians are so tangled up in the Bible and so tangled up in the Word and so tangled up in what God says, that they don't really understand how God works sometimes or how God feels." It's unbelievable. "Christians are so tangled up in the Word, in the Bible and what God says, they don't know how God feels." How else you going to know how God feels, you don't read the Bible? What the guy is saying is, "Look, don't lay any Bible trip on me. I don't feel any guilt, and I'm not going to get hung up on what God says."

My question about that fellow is: Is he a Christian? I don't care if he goes to church all the time. Says in 1 John 2, "That the one who keeps My commandments, verily in him is the love of God perfected. By this, we know that we know Him." Right? If we keep His commandments. I mean, if you can cultivate that kind of abomination in your life and say it doesn't bother you at all; and then just say, well, you don't want to get all tangled up with Bible stuff; independent of the Bible you know how God feels; you got a problem. But sin is that kind of thing. You see, it becomes very self-justifying.

Obviously, that's an extreme illustration; but it simply points up the fact that God has called us to obedience to His Word. We know how He feels, because He gives us how He feels in His Word, right? And that's the issue; and the great objective and the great goal of the ministry—listen, this is so clear in Scripture—is to build an obedient people. That's what God intends to do with His people in the Old Testament. That's what He intends to do in the New, is to produce an obedient people. God speaks. We obey. But, sad to say, very often, when confronted with divine truth that convicts us of something in our life that isn't right, instead of obeying, we just sort of shove it out; and we go in our pattern of disobedience. Maybe, maybe there's a message on forgiveness, and you haven't forgiven somebody. Well, instead of taking care of that, you just push that message out of your conscious mind, go on with your bitter, unforgiving spirit, and so nothing really happens. And that is disobedience. And that is diametrically opposed to all that God wants to accomplish in your life.

You say, "Well, I go to church. I do my part." Well, remember 1 Samuel 15:22 where God said, "To obey is better than [What?] sacrifice." Ritual will never replace obedience. And in 1 Peter, chapter 1, Peter writes that, "We are to gird up the loins of our mind." In other words, get our act together. Pull yourself together. Get your priorities right as obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance. Don't live like you used to live. You are to be obedient children. Luke 11:28: Jesus said, "Happy is the person who hears My Word and keeps it." Who hears My Word and keeps it. Paul commends Christians in Romans 16:19, "For your obedience has come abroad unto all men, and I am glad." That makes the heart of the pastor glad when the, the obedience of his people is made manifest.

Now, you know some things if you come here, because you're being taught them; but if you don't apply those things in an obedient way, you don't mature. I turned on the radio this week, and I was

driving someplace, and on came Howard Hendricks, and he said some things, I thought, that were very interesting. He said that Christians over 50 should be the most turned on, the most excited, the most committed, the purest, the most enthusiastic, and the most available for service. Why? Because they've been hearing the Word the longest. They've been applying it the longest. They've been maturing the longest, and they ought to be showing the fruit of that process, right? I mean the most turned on, enthusiastic, excited, available, dynamic, and powerful people in a church, the very energy of that church ought to be the people who are over 50, over 55, over 60. They ought to be the like, the joy, the thrill, the energy, the dynamic of that church. They ought to be the people out on the cutting edge in evangelism. They ought to be the people out on the cutting edge in prayer. Why? Because they've lived with God the longest. They've applied the Word, so their obedience pattern has gone on longer. Therefore, they're mature more so than those with fewer years, because of constantly applied truth.

But how often have you heard this? And I agree with Howie exactly. How often have you heard this? "Well, the wonderful thing about our church is that it's, it's, it's got so many young people, you know. They're the energy and the dynamic of the church." Now, I like young people. I'm one. I am. And I, I agree with that. I mean there, there's a certain dynamic about young people. I've always said I like to speak to young people, because, at least if they're not interested, they have the courtesy to talk so you know right away they're not interested. And there's a, there is a dynamic with young people. But, listen, that's a sad commentary on a church. When you look at a church, and I hear young pastors say this all the time, "Well, it's full of old people." I hear that. "Well, it's a, it's a nice church and a nice area, but it's just full of old people." That ought to be the dynamic of the church, but you know what the truth is? That if you're a Christian, and you continually fail to apply what you know, you'll just be one of the old people. And by constant non-application of divine truth, you're going to get over 50 or whatever, and you're just going to fold up your tent and steal away into the night. You're going to want to retire spiritually. "Well, I've served for a lot of years. I don't know. I don't want to get in DE [Discipleship Evangelism]. Oh, I'm, I'm older. Let the young people do that." You know?

When we look at the Old Testament, we see the leaders in Israel with the hoary heads, the white-haired men and women who were godly. We look at the early church and the dynamism and dynamic of those mature saints, and we look at the contemporary church, and it has to find its life in young kids. I like kids, but I'm, I'm not interested in a teenybopper church. I think there's more to the church than that. We need the life and energy that the kids have, but we need the power that the mature believers have, who have lived lives long of applying the truth. But if you can hear the truth and walk out and carry on the same pattern of living without ever a conscious effort in the power of the Spirit to apply that truth, what happens is you just get old. That's all. You don't get more powerful. You don't become more dynamic.

I mean, it ought to be that you almost go to heaven by just taking off, you know? It's almost a blastoff experience, because you got, there's so much energy rolling by the time you get near that point in life.

I wish that were true, but I see so many people who go to church and, as they grow older, because they don't really apply the things they hear. They hear them. They get doctrinally eggheaded. They learn a lot of stuff. It's never been applied, so their life hasn't changed. They've hardened into kind of a spiritual coldness, full of facts, and without power. I don't want that to happen in my life. I mean I just want to keep firing out. If it means I have to keep picking up my false teeth off the pulpit—until I finally, you know, maybe one of those days, I'll get so carried away, I'll leave—but I'm not about to, to look back on my life and say all the power and all the energy and all the dynamic was gone by the time I was 45 or 50. I'm not looking to retire from the service of Christ; and I really feel that what happens when people sort of fade away is that they, they've been able to hear the Word of God without its application. Now, in some cases, they haven't really been able to hear it. They haven't been fed. They haven't been taught, but not in this case, and so we must be committed to obedience.

Oh, how very basic this is; obedience to God's Word. If there's a truth, and you hear it consciously in the power of the Spirit, start applying it. When you're confronted with conviction, don't pass it off to somebody else. Don't go away saying, "Boy, I wish so and so would have heard that sermon." You apply it. You apply it, because you're under the lordship of Christ; and as you obey, you progress along the path of maturity to a greater usefulness to God. I would love to see this church filled with people of all ages, but the strength and power coming from those who had learned the most and applied the most in an act of response of obedience.

Let me give you a second attitude. Humility. Humility. That's another thing that we desire greatly to generate in the hearts of people. This has always been a concern of me. I mean I, pride is a problem for me. It's a problem for you, I know. Pride was a major problem for me. I think still is, but used to be maybe more manifest than now. And I always thought once I understood the things of God that God should make me humble. It's very elusive, though, because just when I say to myself, "You're finally humble," it's gone. So it's very difficult to nail it down. Very elusive, but I have always sought to, to want to lead the people in an understanding of humility.

I remember when we built the gymnasium, and it was an auditorium that they put a platform on it, and somebody ordered five big chairs with big arms and crown things sticking up like this, spires off these chairs, and they, that was for me to sit in, the one in the middle. The, the, the one in the middle was mine. They didn't really care who sat in the other ones, but I got the middle one. And I, I tried to sit in that, that crown chair, a couple a weeks, and I just felt miserable. I couldn't do that, and so I went down and sat down in the front row, because I. It wasn't that that's an act of humility. It's just that sitting up on the podium with a crown on your head does say something that I really didn't want to say. So that's the way it was, and it just put me in a perspective to worship like all the rest of you folks. Only difference between me and you is the fact that God's called me to do this and gives to me to do that and that's all. Has nothing to do with my spirituality. And then when Clayton came, he said, "How come you sit down there?" I said, "I don't know. I just feel comfortable down here." "No, I think you should sit on the platform." So I said, "We don't have any chairs." So he looked around and found

some chairs, and the first Sunday he was here, we all had chairs up here. And afterwards he says, "That was no good, was it?" I said, "No, I told you." So he says to me, "You can go back down there."

Well, that's a small thing; but there's an underlying attitude that, that I believe the Spirit of the Scripture conveys to us, and that's one of, of humility that we seek. It isn't that we have found it. It's that we pursue it in the strength of God. When you became a Christian, you weren't on the, under any illusion, I hope, that the Lord was really in need of you. Were you? I hear that. "You know, if the Lord could just save this guy. He's got money. He's got talent. I mean he's a great leader. Wow! If the Lord could just get him." That's ridiculous. The Lord can get anybody He wants, but that isn't the issue. You see, basically, you got nothing to offer—I don't care who you are—neither do I. Like the man in the 18th chapter who, when confronted with his ten-thousand-dollar debt, couldn't pay because, it says, "He had nothing with which to pay." Nothing. Nothing. Nothing to offer. Or like Matthew, chapter 5: When we come to enter the kingdom, it says, we come begging in spirit. We come as beggars so destitute we can't even work to earn a living. We have to beg. We have nothing. We have not only nothing in our hand, we don't have any talent to earn it. So we only can beg, and that's the way we came in, bankrupt. And you want to know something? If we have anything now, it isn't ours. It's what God—what? Gave us.

The only thing I have to offer back to God is what He gave me, sanctified by His salvation and His Spirit; and that's not to my credit, but to His glory. So what would cause me to be proud? We have endeavored to withstand the self-esteem cults, the selfishness of our own contemporary society, to point out the fact that God has called us to meekness and selflessness and sacrificing humility. And that's been a major emphasis and we've come at it from all different angles. We, we remember don't we, Matthew, chapter 10, where the Lord says, let a man deny himself, take up his cross; forsake life and gain life. And where it says the same thing in chapter 16:24 and 25. Take up your cross. Deny yourself. Follow Me. Pay the price of self-effacement, self-humility, self-denigration, setting self below others. And we've gone in detail many times into Philippians chapter 2, which says let each man look on the things of others, not on his own things, esteeming others better than himself. Always getting under and saying, "You're better than I am. I seek what honors You. I seek what lifts You up. I seek what meets Your need."

This is so important in the church. If you have in a church a fight for people and to get into the places of authority, you're going to have the same chaos you had among the disciples, all of whom were seeking to be the greatest, and that's a despicable thing. We're all seeking as it were to be the least and, at the same time, it doesn't mean that we undervalue ourselves because, in Christ, we are eternally priceless. But it isn't because of us. It's because of Him. Humility simply says this, "You're more important than I am." That's all it says. It doesn't go around saying, "I'm a worm. I'm a rat. I'm a bum. I'm nothing. I'm garbage." Doesn't say that. It doesn't say, "I'm no good to anything." You are. You're a value to God, because you're redeemed and sanctified and given certain potential to serve Him. But what humility say is, "You are more important than I am to me."

That's why it says that you're to love your neighbor as—what? As yourself. You are to give to your neighbor the same devotion and commitment that you give yourself in meeting needs. You, you remember our study of 1 Corinthians, how Paul severely reprimands the Corinthian church for the proud, boastful, self-centered, egoistic way in which they manifested their ecstatic experiences, and sort of put on spiritual ribbons, as if they were the more spiritual because they had the more profound ecstasies.

Humility is that which God pursues in His church and that is an attitude that we must have. It means that I'm not going to get upset if something goes your way and not mine, because you're more important to me than I am. That's right. It means that I, I want to make sure that I set aside some of my priorities to make sure your needs are met. It means I say no to my own freedoms to say yes to yours. It means that I'm not going to violate your conscience. If, if, if meat makes you offend, I'm not going to eat any meat. If drink makes you offend, I'm not going to drink any meat, drink anything that, that offends you, for the simple reason that the kingdom of God is not food and drink, but righteousness, joy, peace in the Holy Spirit, as Romans 14 says. I'm not going to violate your conscience. I'm not going to make you stumble. I'm going to set my liberty aside. I'm not going to offend you. I'm going to make sure that if you have a need, I meet that need.

I see myself as one who must care for you, must love you. If you drift from the flock, as Matthew 18 points out, I must go and pursue you and bring you back. That's humility; and it's something like what it says in 2 Corinthians 10:1, the, "the meekness and gentleness of Christ." That's to be mirrored in us. And so it's always been my desire in the church that we would not only be in an overall sense an obedient people, but that there be this flowing through attitude of humility and meekness and loneliness and self-effacement, rather than self-seeking. So many problems come when people seek their own will, seek their own primacy, if you will, or seek to be lifted up. There are people who have to constantly be stroked, constantly be told how wonderful, how great they are, instead of giving their lives to encourage others. Humility; well, we could say a lot more about that. That's always what I say when I've just run out of notes, right?

Third, third attitude is love. You can't talk about humility without talking about love, because only humble people love. Nobody loves but humble people. I'm not talking about the world's kind of love that's counterfeit. It's object-oriented. They see a nice object. They feel an emotional attachment. That's why marriages don't last, because that kind of love is only an emotion; and when the emotion's gone or attaches to somebody else, the relationship is gone. But I'm not talking about the world's kind of object-oriented love. I'm not talking about self-feeding love. To the world, love is great because of what I feel when I'm in love, right? Not because what I can give. It's what I get. It's the thrill, and when the thrill goes, hang the relationship.

So that's the world's idea; but love in a biblical sense is completely different than that. It isn't an emotion at all. Love is simply an act of sacrificial service. Love is an act. Love is not an attitude. It is an act. Love always does something. Read 1 Corinthians, they're all verbs. Love is kind. Love is patient. All those are verb forms. It's love doing this. Love doing that. Love doing this. Love doing that. Love acts. Now, let me tell you something. Love is an act of service on your behalf that flows out of a heart of humility, and the heart of humility says, "I care more about you than me, so love is the response." And that's why I say only humble people love. Proud people can't love, because all proud people want to do is feed themselves. The only love they know is a physical love. The only love they know is an emotional attachment to certain people, and if you're not one of those certain people, you're not going to feel anything from them. You may not even receive anything from them. They have that kind of, of love that, that really draws them to certain like-minded people that they really enjoy being with, but makes them indifferent to the needs of almost everybody else. You understand the difference?

You know, when I first came to the church, I found it difficult to love emotionally certain people, and it bothered me a lot, because I felt responsible before God to love the whole flock, and, yet, there were some people that, no matter how hard I tried, I really didn't love them emotionally. I mean I just didn't care about being with them. I was with them maybe, and I said, "If I'm never with them again, it's okay." And they probably said the same thing. They just, you know, it just didn't click, and that's true. I mean there are some people, I mean I could live my whole life and die and go and heaven and spend all eternity and never spend an hour with them, and I'm really not going to be that sad, and there are a lot of people who feel the same way about me. In fact, I know there are people who are going to find a place in heaven far away from wherever I am. Some are actually anxious to go there, because there won't be tapes in heaven. But nonetheless, it's reasonable, it's reasonable to assume that, in our human relationships, that we can't be attracted to everybody, because we're just not that way. But that isn't love; that, that isn't even an issue. Love simply says, "If you have a need, I meet that need." You see, when Jesus explained that you're to love your neighbor as yourself, and the question came to Him, "Well, who is my neighbor? I mean who do, how do I know who You're talking about?" And then He told the story about the, the Good Samaritan. What He was saying was, "You're walking down the road. There's a guy laying there beaten up. He has a need. You meet his need." That's all. Who's your neighbor? Anybody in your path with a need, that's all. Who are you supposed to love? Anybody in your path with a need. How do you love him? Meet his need.

You may never feel emotional. You may never be attracted to the person, and we've tried to emphasize that all through the years, that we're called to a love that flows out of humility, and humility says you're more important than I am. The classic illustration—and I can remember when I preached on John 13—the classic illustration is in that chapter. I remember the Sunday. I remember the weather. I remember the chapel scene. I remember how the congregation looked. It was indelibly imprinted in my mind by the Spirit, I'm sure, because of its importance. And Jesus was there, and they were all arguing about who was going to be the greatest, and it was time to eat, and they already

started eating, and it was a supper. And in those days, you reclined at supper, which meant your head was about eight inches from somebody else's feet; and it was common courtesy to wash feet before such an occasion. Can't think of anything worse than not having that have happened. But no one there was hired to do it. There was no servant, and none of the disciples would do it, because they were arguing about who was the greatest, and none wanted to do that, stoop down and be a servant. So the Lord took off His outer garment, put a towel around His waist, washed their feet, and gave them an unforgettable, profound lesson. Then He said to them, "You're to love one another as I have loved you." How had He just loved them? By feeling emotional? No, the only emotion he felt was probably disgust. They were sickening, so proud and selfish. It wasn't emotion. It was just that that was needed, and what He's saying is, "When you see somebody has a need, you meet it."

Somebody in your path with a need, and you do that instantaneously, spontaneously, and involuntarily, almost like a reflex, because you have a humble heart, because you have a humble heart. A humble heart will always manifest itself, and it doesn't manifest itself by someone walking around in ragged clothes saying, "I'm a worm. I'm a worm. I'm a worm." Very often, that's a false form of pride. That's the beguiling you, of Colossians 2:18, with false humility. No, humility, humility doesn't go around articulating its humility. Humility can always be seen, because humility acts in service to those in need. Humility considers others better than itself, and it turns into love immediately, and love is an action. Keep it in mind. First John says, "You say the love of God dwells in you? Ask you a simple question. You see your brother have a need? If you close up your compassion toward that need, how dwells the love of God in you?" Because the love of God moves out to meet need. It is not an emotion. It is service to one in need; and if you say you belong to God, 1 John 2:9 to 11 says, and you don't love your brother, you're a liar, because God produces in a Christian true love. So that's an attitude, love, love, love; and it isn't the attitude of, of emotion toward people who are attractive. It's the attitude of serving people with need.

I got a letter this week that illustrates that. I thought it was really great:

Dear Pastor John,

This letter's a long time in coming, but finally I've taken the time to write it. Last May, my husband and I had the opportunity to fellowship at Grace Community Church; and I want to tell you, from a visitor's point of view, about your church and congregation. We come from a very large church, too; and our motto is, "The church where love is." Never in my life, though, have I felt as welcome as I did at Grace Community. The people were terrific. They treated us like royalty. Everywhere we went people surrounded us to welcome us. I met one gentleman, and he gave me an early morning tour of Grace Community Church. Then during the break between first and second service, I met another man. We talked for quite some time. He asked me if I'd like a tape of the morning service. I said, "Of course." A few weeks later, not just one tape arrived, but the whole series on Jesus' teaching on divorce. Many of my friends have listened to this six-tape series, and have had many questions

answered that they had asked for years. My husband and I are going to be at Grace Community again on September 18th. We're so looking forward to it. I just thought you'd like to know how wonderful your congregation is. God bless you and yours.

Isn't that great? I happen to know those two folks. First person that gave them the tour really didn't have time to do that because he has tremendous responsibility. Second person that sent them the tapes didn't have the money to do that, either; did it anyway. But see, that's how love acts, because love flows from a humble heart; and love seeks not its own, but the comfort, satisfaction, joy of others; and it's always been a part of this church. I pray God it always will be; that we have flowing through us an attitude of love, selfless love that flows out of a humble heart.

I'm going to give you one final comment, and then the next twelve next week or beyond. Unity. Unity. Something else that has always been of great concern to me is unity. Jesus prayed in John 17, "Oh, Father, that they may be one as You and I are One, that the world may know that You sent Me." Jesus answers my prayers. I'd like to answer His, wouldn't you? He prayed for unity. In the truest sense, the application of that text is to the unity of the believers that exist in the common, eternal life that comes to us in redemption. But the extrapolation from that is that He desires not only a redemptive unity, but a unity in terms of life and purpose in the church; and Christ really desires the unity of His people. That's why, in Ephesians 4 and verse 3, the apostle Paul calls to the Ephesians and says do this: "Endeavor to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." Right? He doesn't say generate the unity. You already have it. Just keep it. Do all you can to maintain unity; and I think that's such a, such an important part of church life; and that's why Satan so constantly attacks it.

Have you ever noticed how many churches split? How many people leave churches because they're unhappy? How much divisiveness there can be? I was up at Mount Hermon this week, and a lady came to me every day the first two or three days and said, "Please, I have to talk to you. Please, I have to talk to you." And, finally, we sat down, and we spent about 40 minutes, and she bared her heart to me.

She said, "Oh, I'm in the midst of a church split. The whole church is splitting right down the middle."

And I said, "Why, why?"

And she looked at me kind of blank: "I don't know. We can't really figure it out. We don't really know why. Somehow it doesn't even matter why. There's so much division and so many personalities pitted against others that none of us really know the reason anymore." Isn't that incredible? Just splitting.

She said, "What should I do?"

I said, "Be a peacemaker. Do anything you can. Do anything you can to keep it together for the sake of the testimony of Jesus Christ."

"Well, some people are saying it's God's will."

"Well, it isn't God's will. Do you all believe the same?"

"Yeah, we all believe the same. It's just personality conflict." That's so tragic. So tragic.

I remember Patricia and I one time were at a Bible conference with the daughter of Dr. Criswell at Dallas First Baptist, who's a very accomplished soprano soloist; and we were talking about church life; and she was saying that, she calls him daddy. It's hard for me to imagine that term for Dr. Criswell, a man of such dignity, but he is her daddy. And she said, "Daddy went through a terrible thing where a man came in, and was on the staff of the church, and tried to gather a faction and split the church." (A great church like that.) And she said, "He was so overwrought in his heart. He could see it coming. So after one Sunday when he was particularly exercised about that, he called up some construction company, unilaterally acting without consulting the board or anybody. He said, 'I want before next Sunday kneeling benches installed in every pew in this church.' And so in came the crews and by the next Sunday, when everybody came, they had flip-down kneeling benches. [They're still there to this day in the First Baptist Church of Dallas.] And he got up, and he said, 'In the forty-five years pastorate of George W. Truett, who preceded me, and in the thirty-five or whatever years that I've been here, there has never been a split in this church; and by the grace of God, there never will be.'" And he called those people to pull down those kneeling benches and took that entire church of thousands of people to their knees in prayer; and God brought a healing in that congregation.

Now, that brings God glory, doesn't it? That honors His name, and I believe that the enemy is ever incessantly trying to divide the church, and I thank Him and praise Him that in the twenty-five plus years ministry of this church, there's never been a church split. Oh, you have picky little things, and some folks would get upset, and they'd want to leave because the color of the curtains isn't right, or because something didn't go the way they ought to have it go, they thought. And, very often, they might be right; but humility and love doesn't act that way anyway.

And so we have endeavored to somehow cultivate in the heart of God's people, and in my own heart, as well, unity. Satan wants to shred things. It just never stops. He either wants to get into the staff someone who's unhappy and cause a, a faction there; and I bless the name of God for the sweetest unity we've ever had in the history of this church on our staff. I mean we just praise God for it, and we keep an eye out, because we know the enemy always wants to sow discord, always. And every once in a while, somebody comes along, you know, and they want to make a little discord about this or that. We just ask God, "Give us a congregation full of peacemakers who want to make sure they maintain unity, not sow discord." And even if they're right—just because you're right, you don't always

have to get the platform, do you? Sometimes you can say, "God, You and I know I'm right, but let's set that aside and seek unity." And nobody's perfect. There's going to be cause for disagreement. But bless God, when we get on our knees together we can seek to maintain the unity and the Spirit and the bond of peace.

This is the desire of the New Testament writers. Colossians, we, or Corinthians 1:10, 1 Corinthians says, "I beseech you, brethren," [and Paul is really pouring out his heart to the Corinthians] "by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, [not for me, not for my sake, not for the sake of my reputation or anything else, but for the sake of the Lord Jesus Christ] speak the same thing. Let there be no division among you. Be perfectly knit together in the same mind and the same judgment." He says in the next verse, "I hear there are contentions among you," and I can't stand it, he says, I can't stand it. "Is Christ divided?" he says. It can't be. Christ is not divided. Philippians 1, he says you ought to be "striving together for the...gospel." Unity.

Attitudes. Do you see them in your life? Is your life characterized by obedience so that there's a progressing maturity? There's a, a mounting degree of sanctification as you hear the Word and instantly and properly apply it? Can you see growth? So that when you reach the end of your earthly years, you will be reaching the climax of your spiritual life in terms of dedication?

And what about humility? Have you abandoned yourself for the sake of others so that out of that humble heart comes loving action? And do you, at all costs, and at all self-sacrifice, seek by making peace to maintain the unity of the Spirit? This is what we're after. This is what we're after, and I believe this is God's will for us. Let's bow in prayer.

Father, I ask that You would start with me. Rekindle in my heart a dedication to obedience. Help me to, by the grace of the Spirit of God, experience the humility that looks on others, not on myself, and sees others better than myself. Help me to make sacrifices in meeting needs for any in my path whose need I am able to meet, and seek nothing in return. And at all costs, Lord, with my action and my tongue may I be a source of unity and not discord. For if there's not humility and there's not love and there's not a pursuit of unity, then there's not really obedience, either; and I would be guilty, as all of us would, of hearing the truth and not applying it and becoming hardened and stagnant, cold.

We're going to close in prayer in a moment; but while your head's bowed, I'd like all of us to sort of covenant together in our hearts before God. And would you pray and ask the Lord to produce in you these four attitudes we've talked about this morning? You pray silently for God to give you a heart of obedience no matter what the price, for God to break your pride and humble you, give you love that reaches out to those in need, and make you a peacemaker who seeks it at all costs the unity of the body.

If you found it difficult to pray for those things, it only says how hardened your heart has become; if you were unwilling, all the harder. You have heard and not obeyed; and now you have developed habits of disobedience, so hard to break, and perhaps you must pursue in intercessory prayer a breaking of spirit, the launching of a new habit of obedience.

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