

## **The Internal Systems, Part 2**

Selected Scriptures

2026

This morning it's on my heart to continue to share from my heart with you. Several weeks ago, I felt the need to just talk about things that I believe are important for our church. And I confess to you that this is something which the Spirit of God has impressed upon my mind, not so much as a sermon, but as a passion. And as I said when we began, I'm not always certain how I'm going to say it, how it's going to come out, how the Spirit of God may direct my thinking to frame it. But I really believe it's needful that we talk about the essential ingredients, the essential elements in a church that honors the Lord Jesus Christ.

God has blessed this church. There are reasons why He has. His sovereignty is one reason. But another is because Grace Community Church has been committed, I believe, through the years of its existence, to the right things. And by that, I mean to the things of the Word of God. And we're taking a few weeks to just reaffirm those things. So for those of us who may have forgotten or for those of us who are new, we can kind of reestablish where we have found our strength and our blessing.

And I've entitled this brief series "The Anatomy of a Church," "The Anatomy of a Church." We've borrowed the biblical analogy of a body, and we've said that, basically, we could reduce the body to four elements. This is not clinical. This is just for the sake of analogy. A body is skeleton, internal systems, muscles, and flesh, and so is a church that is the body of Christ.

There must be the skeleton, and we talked about that in our first study together, and we said that there are some things that frame and form the church, without which it would be a shapeless blob. There are some bottom line things, some non-negotiable, some irreducible minimums, some foundations, some framework things, some form and substance realities that must be at the very center of our life as a church. And I suggested five of them.

First is a high view of God. A church, to be what God wants it to be, must have as its focus God Himself. And there are a lot of other possible foci, if you will, but there's only one proper focus, and that's on God. In other words, as we focus on God, everything finds its proper place. There can be no compromise when God is all in all, and all we do is for His consummate glory.

Now that is essentially the meaning of whatever you do, whether you eat or drink, do it all to the glory of God. That's the focus of everything. And then we suggested, secondly, the absolute priority of Scripture, because we cannot focus on God unless we know who He is, and we do not know who He is unless we understand His revelation, which is the Word of God. So we begin with a high view of God, and we affirm the absolute priority of Scripture, which reveals God.

Thirdly, we are committed to doctrinal clarity, looking at God through His Word, drawing truth out of

His Word. And then, fourthly, to personal holiness, applying that truth to life, and then fifthly, spiritual authority, holding people accountable for the living out of that truth.

Now, these are framework things: high view of God, which means we are absolutely committed to the revelation which He's given of Himself, which means that we must clarify that and give it to folks in a practical, understandable way, so that they can apply it in the matter of personal holiness and then bring that all under spiritual authority.

Those are framework truths. Therefore, they must be preached. They must be taught. They must be modeled and patterned. And they are continually needing to be reaffirmed, and that's why we go back to those things. You know, when we meet on the Lord's Day, and when we have classes, and Bible studies, and fellowship groups, and so forth, one of the very essential features of that is a continual reaffirmation of our basic values. We meet together to reaffirm the things to which we are committed.

And when we come together on the Lord's Day, what do we do? Well, first of all, we worship in song, and prayer, and in the Scripture that offers praise to God, and that's why I always read the Psalms, or most always. And then the choir sings great truths about our glorious God, and the instruments play to His praise, as it says in Psalm 150. And all of that is to cultivate in our hearts and reaffirm a high view of a holy God.

And then behind that comes the Word of God, because we prioritize the Word, and so we teach the Scripture. And as we teach the Scripture, we draw out of it truth or doctrinal clarity. And then in the message, as it comes to a conclusion, we apply that to the heart, where personal holiness can be the response.

And, as you go from this place, we hope that you take that fourth step, personal holiness, with you and you go out to live it. And then we come behind that with shepherding, which is the spiritual authority that gives oversight to the flock. So what we do is not just grab-bag. It is to step into consistent line with these irreducible realities that we've affirmed.

Now, secondly, and in our last message, we began to look at these, and we will for several messages, because there are several of them that I want to emphasize. We talked about internal systems. A body has to have internal systems. You can't just have a skeleton and muscles, flesh. You wouldn't have life. There has to be a flowing through of all the systems of the body, and I believe that's true in the church.

You can't just affirm solid doctrinal foundations. There has to be a life flow. And I believe that life flow is proper attitudes, proper attitudes. It's a battle for the mind, folks. It really is. It's a battle for the mind, because "as a man - " what? " - thinks in his heart, so is he." It's a battle for the mind.

And so what we are trying to do in the ministry is to get you to have proper spiritual attitudes, to cultivate in you right kind of thinking, that you may be - to put in Pauline terms - "renewed in the spirit of your mind." That you may, as Paul said to the Philippians, "think on these things." That you may have a renewed mind. That you may put on the mind of Christ. That you may be spiritually-minded. All those are biblical phrases. In other words, we want to get you thinking right.

To be honest with you, it isn't a question of trying to control your behavior. It's a question of trying to get a handle on your thinking, which will produce right behavior. You may be forced to do right things with wrong thoughts, and motives, and reasons, and attitudes, and all your right things are nothing more than hypocrisy. That's all, just hypocrisy. And so, we don't major on forcing you to conform outwardly, but on the endeavor to create within your thinking right spiritual attitudes.

And when you think right, you act right. So we're not just interested in programs. We're not just interested in activities. We're not just interested in conformity to some kind of external code, but rather in cultivating internal attitudes that honor God. So the flowing through in the body of the systems is what it ought to be, and the body is whole, and healthy, and productive, and dynamic, and rightly representative of its head, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now, let me just review what we said in our last study together. The first and foremost attitude that needs to be cultivated is the attitude of obedience, of obedience. That is the sine qua non of all attitudes. It is the all-pervasive attitude. It is the attitude that says, "I will obey God at any cost." It is the attitude of no compromise. It is the attitude that says, "If God says it, that settles it. I'll do it."

It is the attitude that doesn't negotiate with God, that doesn't justify sin, but it seeks always and only to do the will of the Lord. It is better than sacrifice. That is, it is better than any external act of worship. It is internal obedience, and all right spiritual attitudes start there. If you're not willing to obey God to start with, there's nothing going to come beyond that but difficulty, trial, negative circumstance.

The second attitude we talked about was humility, humility. Obedience and humility, and that basically is the attitude that thinks other people are more important than I am. You're more important than I am. Your needs are more important than my needs. Your wants are more important than my wants. Your happiness is more important than my happiness. Your joy is more important than my joy. Your place is more important than my place. Your reputation is more important than mine. All of those things. It's the selflessness of the Lord Jesus Christ who humbled Himself, Philippians chapter 2. That is an essential attitude, because pride is such a devastating thing.

Thirdly, we talked about the attitude of love, and love is humility in action. Love is simply humility doing things. Humility and love are inseparable, you see, because only humble people can love. I can't give myself to you unless I care more about you than I do me. I can't abandon myself to your needs unless I really am humble, and so humility gives a launching pad for love. If humility is selflessness, then love is selfless service, selfless giving.

And then, fourthly, we talked about unity. When you have people committed to obedience, and you have people committed to love, because they have hearts that are humble, you will see the result, which will be unity. Humility leads to love, and love leads to unity, because where people are all giving themselves away to others, there's marvelous unity. You meet my needs, I'll meet your needs, and it goes on and on, and that kind of interchange is what builds the true, one-heart, one-mind, one-soul unity of which the Bible speaks. But it springs out of humility. That's such a critical matter.

So we talked about those first elements, and I want to read you a letter that someone sent in response to those first ones, and I think it's just very heartwarming and encouraging to all of us. Listen to it.

“Your last two sermons on ‘The Anatomy of a Church’ have been convicting. I am praying that God will use this series to do a great work in the hearts of the flock at Grace. This morning you spoke about humility. I would like to share with you how the Lord is working in my life regarding this issue.

“In the early summer, I read a book by Andrew Murray on humility and I began to pray that God would teach me to be humble. Well, you know what happens when we pray according to His will. A few weeks ago, He gave me the opportunity to exercise all the Scripture knowledge that I had been learning here at Grace. I volunteered to go with four others from Grace to the trash dumps in Mexico to minister to the people who live there. It was an experience I will never forget.

Aside from the poor living conditions, the filth was enough to make you sick. My job, once we got there, was to wash the heads of the children, which had lice. This was something I had never done before. Can you imagine 25 children in a line before you, all with various degrees of lice? Not to mention, we had no running water, just tubs of water that were used over and over and over for all the children.

“We stood outside in the sun, and it was over 100 degrees. As I stood there washing head after head, my thoughts went from disgust to joy. One little boy had lice so bad that he had sores on his head. Well, I must admit that, at first, I wasn’t too wild about touching those sores. However, I started to think about how Jesus had washed the disciples’ feet, and I was humbled right then before God, realizing that this child’s need was much greater than my comfort.

“I learned some great lessons that day about sacrifice and considering others more important than myself, and I pray that God will continue to work in my life to teach me the things that will bring Him glory.”

Well, that’s a wonderful letter. And that’s the expression of a humble heart. That’s the expression of a loving heart. It makes sacrifices to meet the needs of others. Those are attitudes for which there is no substitute, and if there’s to be life flowing through the church, there must be obedience, humility, love, sense of unity.

Now, let me go on to talk about a few more of these attitudes. Let’s call the fifth one willingness to serve, willingness to serve, because it flows right out of what we’ve just said about love, and humility, and so forth, and really is another way to say the same thing. Willingness to serve.

Someone said to me the other day, “You know, we don’t go to your church anymore. We’ve gone to a small church where they need us.” People say that to me often, and I don’t quite - that’s okay. Maybe the Spirit of God led them. God bless them. They’re dear people and I’m sure the Lord led them there. But it isn’t that we don’t need you.

I mean, look at all of these people. You think they don’t have needs? It isn’t that the more people you have, the less need you have. What people seem to mean is that they got programs over there, and they don’t have anybody to run them, and they need folks to help them with the program, and that might be right. But ministry is not necessarily related to church-designed programs. You got that one? It isn’t.

I mean, you could come here and say, “Well, we go to the church, but we don’t do anything. We don’t sing in the choir, or teach a class, or sweep the floor, or do whatever. We don’t do anything. We go there, and we just don’t know whether there’s a need.” Take a look around you. All kinds of people with need all over the place. It all depends on your perspective, see?

Go to 1 Corinthians for a minute, chapter 4, and I want to show some Scriptures to you, and then make a conclusion. 1 Corinthians 4, and Paul says this. “Let a man so account of us, - ” In other words, when it comes to rendering a judgment about me and the ones with me, when it comes to saying, “Well, who was this guy?” When it comes to writing my epitaph, if you will, when it comes to saying my eulogy, when it comes to reciting what contribution I made, when it comes to my time to be praised, would you please say this? “He was a servant of Christ.”

I like that. I can think of at least a half a dozen words in the Greek language for “servant,” of which he uses the lowest one, the word *hupēretēs*. *Hupēr* means “under”; *eretēs*, from the word “to row.” An under rower. They had great, hulking, wooden ships. They had in the hull of those ships three tiers. They were called “triremes,” three tiers of slaves chained to their oars, and they pulled those hulking masses through the seas. The guys on the bottom were the under rowers.

Paul says, “Look. When it comes time to evaluate the apostle Paul, don’t name cathedrals after him. Don’t even name a city in Minnesota after me,” he says. “Don’t name a school after me. Don’t give me an honorary doctorate. Just say, ‘He was a third-level galley slave, and bless his heart, he pulled his oar.’ ” Servant. Lot of people want to be a hotshot. God wants people who pull the oar.

In verse 2, he says the key to this whole thing is “that a man be found - ” what? “ - faithful.” Faithful. You don’t want a clever rower who’s got a new way to do it and, meanwhile, shears off everybody else’s oars in the process. You want a faithful rower. That’s it. Who sees himself as a servant. In verse 3, he says, “With me it’s a very small thing that I should be judged by you, or man’s judgment.”

What are you saying? “I’m not in this deal for your opinion. I’m not doing this to get accolades. I’m not serving the Lord Jesus Christ to be judged by you. I can’t accept your judgment.” And I understand what he’s saying. I really do. You see, people don’t always know what’s going on inside. They may praise you, and you may have corrupt motives. They may curse you, and you may have the purest motives in the world, and you’re struggling to get through your own humanness.

I mean, you don’t really - sometimes you preach your heart out and you know it was terrible. You missed it. You blew it. And I’ve had those times and gone away with tears, because I just, I didn’t do what I thought should honor God. And you go away, and some dear soul will say, “Marvelous, the greatest sermon you’ve ever preached.” And you smile and shake their hand and say, “Thank you.” And you know they don’t know. And other times, man, you’ve just been flying like an eagle, and you go down, and someone says, “You’re not feeling well today, are you?” And you say, “What? Man, I never felt better.” “No, you didn’t seem like yourself, kind of fumbled around.” Then people criticize you, and evaluate you, praise you, blame you, bless you, curse you.

Paul says, “I’m not getting into that game. I just want to pull my oar. That’s all. And I’m really not interested in what people say.” He says, “They don’t know the facts.” And I like this at the end of verse 3. “And I’m not even judging my own self.” You know that? “I can’t even trust my own judgment. I’m so biased in my own favor.”

He says in verse 4, “Even when I don’t know anything against myself, that doesn’t justify me.” I may not be uncovering all the rocks in my life. I may think I’m doing good. That doesn’t justify me. He that judges me is - ” what? “ - the Lord.” The Lord. And so I’m going to “judge nothing before that day when He comes, and manifests the attitudes of the heart, - ” the motives of the heart. And when He sees there a servant’s heart, that’s what I want.

So he’s called us to be third-level galley slaves, pull our oar, be faithful, not try to make a reputation, not even evaluate our own selves favorably, just pull our oar and let the Lord judge. That’s why in Acts 20, he says, “Serving the Lord with all humility of mind.” We’re right back to that humility.

These things are inextricably woven together. In fact, you could just about take any one of these attitudes, and if you cultivated that one attitude in your life, the spin-off would be every one of these other attitudes would have to occur. You couldn’t have love without humility. You couldn’t have humility without love. You couldn’t have true unity in the fellowship without love and humility. You can’t truly serve with a servant’s heart without love, and you can’t be a servant with a servant’s heart without humility. It’s all interwoven. It’s as if the Lord is coming at the same issue from all different angles, and if He could just get us to grab onto one, lock into it, and concentrate on that, everything else would find its proper place.

You say, “Well, what do you mean by ‘a willingness to serve?’ ” I simply mean this. I’m not talking about church programs. Go with me to Romans chapter 12 for a moment. We talked about motive. Now let’s talk about function. In Romans 12:4, we pick up this body analogy again, and it says, “As we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same function: So we, *being* many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another. Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us - ” You can stop there.

So we have this body, right? And the body has all different members, like a human body, and the church is the same way, and every one of us has different gifts. And then he demands of us, if you have gifts of “prophesying, then prophesy; of ministry, *then let us* minister; teaching, then teach; exhorting, then exhort; giving, then give; ruling, *do* with diligence; showing mercy, *do it* with cheerfulness.” In other words, he says, “Get on with it, man. You don’t need a program.” If you’re a believer, you have a God-given ability to minister, and it needs to flow out of your life.

It may be within a structure. Bless God, that’s a wonderful way. It may be very, very personally. But a believer who’s not ministering is a contradiction in terms, because a believer is one indwelt by the Spirit of God, empowered by the Spirit of God for service, and not to serve is to somewhere create a bottleneck. And to come to a church and say, “Well, I came there, but they got all these people, and I don’t really know where I could serve.” Listen, man, if you’re filled with the Spirit of God, He wants to cultivate through you a ministry that is absolutely essential.

Now, it says here the word “prophecy,” and then it talks about “ministry.” Those are very broad terms. Teaching: very broad. Exhorting, giving, ruling, showing mercy: very broad. Those are really not just narrow, little, tiny, isolated things, but those are categories. Within the category of giving, there’s all kinds of ways to give. Within the category of showing mercy, multitude of ways to show mercy. In the category of preaching and teaching, myriad ways to preach and teach, and styles, and so forth, and so on.

The point is this. These are categories of giftedness, and in your life and mine, the Lord has blended from those various categories a perfect blend and given us a gift that is ours alone, that is the perfect blending together of those categories of giftedness. There are others listed in 1 Corinthians 12, also. So I see them as categories, and out of them the Lord picks a dimension, and mixes it with another and another and another.

I look at my own life, and I say, "Obviously, God has called me to preach, and to teach, and to lead, and to exhort, and to demonstrate the gift of knowledge, perhaps." So He's picked this, and that, and this, and He blends it so that every one of us becomes a spiritual snowflake, no two alike. And if you don't function, if you don't serve in whatever simple way you can, it's not the attitude that God would have.

And it's so easy to generate a spectator sort of thing. That's not it. This church has never been content with it. I remember years ago when *Moody Monthly* came out and wanted to do an article on our church. We were still over in the chapel, but we had people busting out all over the place, and they wanted to do a thing on us, and I didn't really know them in those days. It was long before I'd written books for Moody Press and things.

They came out and Lowell Saunders did an article on our church. And after studying it, surveying it, and interviewing folks, the title he gave to the article was "The Church with 900 Ministers," because we had 900 people in those days, and he said, "Everybody's serving." We had less programs then than we do now in terms of formal programming, but everybody was after it. They were doing it. They were just doing it, ministering their gifts.

People were calling up and say, "Is there anybody in the hospital I could go see? Can I help in the nursery? Can I go over there and help those dear ladies who are chasing those little guys all over the carpet? Can I move chairs? Can I clean restrooms? Can I wash windows? I just want to use the gift that helps. Is there a place you could use somebody who, who wants to teach? I'd love to learn if you train me. Is there a place you could put somebody who wants to reach people with the Gospel? We'd like to help." Or else we'd hear, "Hey, we got a ministry going over here, and it's marvelous, and God's blessing it. We're using our gifts. Glory to His name, and all this."

That's the way it ought to be in the church. Maybe when it gets big, everybody thinks somebody else is going to do it, but the bigger it gets, the greater the need is, and we just need more folks being involved. But it isn't just that. It isn't that we need to do something to build the "church" or to accomplish some program goal.

If you're a Christian, and you're in the body of Christ, you got to be doing your part, if you want to know joy, if you want to know blessing, if you want to be obedient. So many needs, just start using your gifts. Doesn't matter. You don't have to analyze your gift. You may never know what it - I don't know what my gift is other than I know I preach, I teach, I do a few things. I don't need to catalog the thing. You don't need a computer deal. You could send away. Get a deal, send, they'll send a computer printout on what your gift is. Yeah, but that's ridiculous. Computer doesn't know.

I've been watching myself for a long time and I'm not sure that I know the, the way God's blended it all together. I basically know what I don't do well probably better than I know what I do. But the way I

understand my gift is when I start to minister, and I just turn around and look back and says, "So that's what I do." And when you get into flow of ministry and the power of the Spirit of God, you'll see what God'll do through you.

You know, there's no end to the need. I just heard the other day that 70 percent of the people over 18 in the San Fernando Valley are single. Is that incredible? A lot of homes are just flying apart, aren't they? Seventy percent. This is the swingers' age, divorcees, single parents. Talk about needs. People, we have needs. Needs everywhere. Needs all around our fellowship.

I'll say another thing about single people while I'm talking about it. I think sometimes single people think the only thing in life for them is to get married. Let me tell you. You have an alternative, a better thing than that. Read 1 Corinthians 7. Paul says only get married if you have to, I mean if you can't get out of it. And if you don't have the gift of singleness, and you just burn, and you just got to get married, get married. But, man, if you can stay single, stay single.

I believe in our church single people provide probably the greatest resource for spiritual ministry, because they're not encumbered. It says in 1 Corinthians 7:35-36, that whole thing from 32 on, single people care for the things of the Lord. Married people care for the family, their wives, their spouse, and all the needful things to care for. That's not wrong. It's just that if you can be single, enjoy it, and think about all the single people we need to reach. Listen, there are myriad of things. Just cultivate whatever ministry God has put in your heart and God has gifted you for.

Oh, I want to just introduce you to two favorite people of mine that are a little bit obscure. Colossians 4:12. Colossians 4:12. This man's name is Epaphras. Epaphras. Listen to this. I like this so much. It says, "Epaphras, who is *one* of you." Isn't that good? Who is he? Ph.D., D.D., L.L.D., M.D., seminary grad, Phi Beta Kappa? No, no, no, no. Ordained? No, no. "Epaphras, who is *one* of you." Folks, just folks, bless him. "He's a servant of - " whom? " - Christ."

Isn't that beautiful? I mean, I thought of that years back. I thought that would be a wonderful thing to put on somebody's tombstone who was just a beloved, wonderful Christian. Just say his name, one of us, a servant of Christ, just one of us. It's a very high calling. "He greets you." What was his ministry? Great preacher? Great orator? No, no, no. What was his ministry? Oh. He's "always laboring to the point of exhaustion fervently for you in prayer." Isn't that good? God, give us some Epaphras. "He's just one of you," he says to the Colossians. "Just one of your guys, and he always fervently prays." So what's he praying for? He's praying "that you may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God."

Here is a guy who carries on his heart the burden of everybody's spiritual development. I believe this is the gift of faith. The gift of faith is linked to prayer. Here is a guy with the gift of faith, and I don't know what other gifts were mingled in, but, man, he just exercised it to the hilt. He didn't need an organized program. He just got on his knees and stayed there. Prayed. Prayed.

There's another fellow in Philippians 2:25, name's even close. "Epaphroditus, my brother, and companion in labour, and fellowsoldier, but your messenger." In other words, "You sent him to me." And what is his thing? What does he do? Oh. "He ministered to my need." What was he? He was a companion. You know how valuable it is to have a companion? You know what it means just to have somebody along when you're in the battle? Just to be a loved friend? Somebody to take up the



sword and fight with you? Lots of folks need that.

“And he ministered to my need. He longed after you all, he was full of heaviness, because you heard that he was sick.” I mean, this is unbelievable. The guy is upset. He’s full of a heavy heart. Why? Because he knows that his church found out he’s sick. He thinks they’ll be sad about it, and he’s so sad that they’re sad about him being sick. He’s not sad that he’s sick. He’s sad that they’re sad that he’s sick. What a guy. He’s not riding back from the field saying, “Pray for me. I have a hangnail.” You know? He’s sad because they’re sad that he’s sick. What a loving relationship those folks must’ve had, huh? And he was sick. Verse 27. He was so sick he nearly died. He got sick and nearly died.

You say, “Well, how’d he get sick?” Oh, verse 30, “For the work of Christ, he nearly died. He was so busy trying to supply your service to me.” I don’t know, I think when we get to heaven, people like this are going to stick out. We’re going to have to look hard to find some of the ones we knew better. Bless his heart. So in verse 29, he says, “Receive him. I’m sending him to you. Just receive him and hold him in high reputation.” Oh, what has he done? Oh, he was a companion. He was a helper.

You see, folks, it’s a matter of spontaneity. It’s a matter of what’s inside. If you just have a willingness to serve, it just is going to come out. I mean, if you’re always standing back saying, “Well, I don’t want to get involved in that deal. I don’t know if they’ll accept me.” Or, “I don’t know if I like working with those.” You could play those games all you want. Or you could just serve, just serve.

Let me give you another one, joy, joy. That’s the sixth internal spiritual attitude. In our tent meetings the last couple nights, Ken Poor was talking about this matter of joy. We had a wonderful time thinking about it, talking about it, and we enjoyed a lot of it, I think, too. What do we mean by joy? Well, joy is sort of an outward exuberance. It’s the response of the heart, the soul, the mind, the body, the whole person to the relationship to Jesus Christ, and one of the things we’ve endeavored to cultivate in this church is joy.

There’s a seriousness in the Word of God. Oh, yes. There’s a seriousness in dealing with the infinitely holy and all-wise God, sovereign God with whom we have to do. There’s a great seriousness in struggling through the terrible pressures and anxieties of life, and death, and all that humanness brings to bear upon us. There are lots of things that pain us, but, at the same time, we are filled with joy, and that is a deep soul enthusiasm that all is well and ultimately all will be glorious.

I believe that joy comes out of the Word of God. I believe as we study the Word of God, as we obey the Word of God, joy is ours. “These things I write unto you, - ” 1 John 1:4 says, “ - that your joy may be - ” what? “ - full.” “And the Kingdom of God - ” it says in Romans “ - is righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit.” Jesus said that He came to give us joy. Paul says, “Rejoice always, again, I say rejoice.”

And I’m convinced that joy is linked to this whole matter of a willingness to serve. I see people getting involved in the things of the Lord, and doing things, and using their gifts, and there is joy. Why? Because the joy comes in giving yourself away. People who are introspective, well, they’re trying to collect it all, and meet their own needs, and solve their own problems, and satisfy all their own wants, become inwardly ingrown, self-contemplating, miserable human beings.

It's the people who throw their lives away that are filled with joy. And we want a church that's filled with joy. I mean, I get excited about things, and I, I don't let things steal my joy. I fight to maintain my joy. Some people try to take my joy. They do. They come and say, "John, we got a real problem over here, very serious, very serious." I say, "Well, what is it?" And they tell me some little thing, you know, a little nothing thing. And I, I just say, "Well, we'll just see if the Lord won't solve that problem. We'll do what we can."

And sometimes they'll come and have a problem that's a problem. It's a big problem. And I've just cultivated in my own heart, just a cultivating thing, that whenever I have a real big problem, I instantly react by saying, "That is really exciting. Boy, that's terrific. Thank you so much. I'm so excited about that problem." Some of you who've been around me know that's what I've been saying. "Boy, I'm so glad to know that. What a terrific problem."

They look at me, you know, like my elevator doesn't go to the top floor. But, you see, if I know what the problem is, I'm ahead of the game, right? Because I know the problem solver. But if I don't know what the problems are, then I am really in trouble. I don't have any trouble if I know where the problems are. I have joy, because I know the one who solves the problems.

You can lose your joy. You can start looking for the manure pile in every meadow if you want. You can live life that way. I mean you can just - it's a choice. It's a choice you make. I choose to be joyful. I choose to be happy. I choose to be enthusiastic. I choose to be excited about what God's doing. And I don't care what you tell me, you're not going to affect that if I can help it in the strength of the Spirit of God. Because I believe the Bible commands me to rejoice always, and, again, I say, "Rejoice."

And so I say to my spirit, "Rejoice, MacArthur, rejoice. Rejoice in the God who redeemed you and loves you in spite of yourself. Rejoice that someday you're going to heaven. Sure you have problems, but someday you're going to get to heaven. You're going to have a whole congregation of perfect people. They're going to have a perfect preacher, and you won't even need each other, so you can dismiss church and all go home."

Listen, don't let anybody take your joy, and if you don't have the joy of the Lord, it's because you're looking at the wrong stuff. Joy's available. We can rejoice in anything. We're going to talk about that tonight. All things work together for good, therefore, whatever comes is a source of joy. I never saw people any happier than when they know they've solved a problem. You can't get that happy if you don't have one to start with.

Let me talk about a sixth attitude, peace, peace. That's a beautiful word, isn't it? Peace. "My peace I leave with you, not as the world giveth give I unto you. Let not your heart be - " what? " - troubled. Neither let it be afraid." Jesus gave us His peace. First Corinthians 7:15 says, "God has called us to peace." Let the peace of God rule in your hearts, Philippians 4 says. "Live in peace," 2 Corinthians 13:11. "Be at peace among yourselves," 1 Thessalonians 5:13. Peace.

If joy is the outward exuberance, peace is the inward contentment. And when you see people who come to the Lord, and they talk about joy and peace, don't they? The joy of the Lord and its deep, settled peace. Peace. In other words, that's the inward contentment that says, "Everything is under control. Everything's under control."

Now that's not true if there's sin in your life. But where you're dealing with sin, and you're walking in the Spirit, no matter what happens, peace. We should never allow anyone to take our peace. Through the years of ministry here, we have tried to cultivate in the heart an attitude of peace, an attitude of rest, an attitude of confidence in God. I've been pouring out my soul for weeks now on Romans chapter 8, trying to show you that you're secure in Jesus Christ, and the byproduct of that kind of security is a deep, profound sense of rest. Peace. Peace of soul.

No reason to be troubled. No reason to be anxious. That's why Paul says, "Be anxious for - " what? " - nothing." Nothing. Let the peace of God rule your soul. All of us are tested at that point, sure, and we don't perfectly live in peace, but that's an attitude we must have. An attitude of peace.

Let me give you a corollary, and this is what I really want to emphasize. We could say a lot about peace itself. In Matthew chapter 5, our Lord said, "Blessed are the peace - " what? " - makers for they shall be called the sons of God." Christians should be peacemakers. Beloved, you couldn't do anything more wonderful for the kingdom of God, the church of Jesus Christ, than to be a peacemaker. What a wonderful thing.

Human nature tends toward conflict, doesn't it? Just as Job says, "Man is born into trouble as the sparks fly upward." I mean, life just sparks as people rub against each other. Conflict, it just happens. It happens in personalities. It happens just continually. And the thing that we could do that would be just marvelous is to be peacemakers. Don't foment the anxiety. Soothe it.

I mean, I hear things. Somebody'll say, "Well, you know, something's wrong at Grace Church, boy," and then they get this little thing going here. And somebody else hears it, somebody else. And all of a sudden, this tidal wave comes, you know, in over me. And I say, "Wait, I think that's a little out of proportion, folks." And instead of somebody along the line being a peacemaker, we have this sort of piling up of people who, rather than making peace, made trouble. And I've been part of that, too, sometimes. We all fall into that.

Somewhere in our hearts has to be that commitment to that attitude that says, "I am at peace. All is well. God is in control. He's still on His throne. I'll be a peacemaker." Oh, what a beautiful thing. Be a peacemaker. Be a peacemaker. Every time you get an opportunity to come into a conflict, make peace. Bring two parties together so that they can embrace each other. Be a peacemaker.

Don't take a side over here against this person over here. Try to find what's good about this person, good about this person. Eliminate the things that are bad, on the basis of what you can see that's right about that thing, cultivate proper relationships and be a peacemaker. Start in your own family.

You know, there are some things, men, that you can say that'll send your wife into orbit, and you know it. Don't say those things. Why would you do that? You know, there are some times in our family when I'm right. My wife thinks I'm wrong sometimes, but I'm right. Sometimes I'm wrong, but sometimes I'm right. And there are some times when she thinks I'm wrong, and I am right, and God and I may be the only two that know, but I'm right. But I'm not going to assert that because it doesn't make peace. I'm not going to compromise conviction, but I'm certainly not going to defend my rights if they don't make peace, because peace is more important to me than my own will and my own way.

It's not more important to me than God's way, and that's why I do fight some battles continually against those who deny the truth of God, but make peace with those who are in His family. We must be peacemakers. Oh, if, if you could just understand these things, how simple life can become.

One more, thankfulness. And these are so obvious, and this is just simple review, these just basic things. "In every thing give thanks," 1 Thessalonians 5:18. In everything give thanks. "In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God concerning you." People stumble all over trying to find the will of God, looking for the will of God. They think God is a universal Easter Bunny who stashed it in the bushes, and He's saying, "You're getting warmer. You're getting warmer," as they poke around in God's will.

I just read a 425-page book on how to find God's will. I found God's will in 1 Thessalonians 5:18, "In every thing give thanks." Four words: just be thankful. Just be thankful. People say, "Oh, if I had a better job, I had a better wife, had a better husband, had a better family, had a better situation, better car, better this, better that, didn't have all these problems, all - " Be thankful. Thanksgiving is the most powerful thing, I'm telling you, in your life. If you can ever cultivate a thankful heart, you can solve so many problems. All you have to do is just keep offering God thanks and praise, and it'll eliminate all your problems. You just don't see them anymore.

I mean that's what the Psalmist did. He'd get in a problem. He'd be hiding somewhere under a rock because he's afraid Absalom is going to kill him. I mean this is David, right? He's got nobody to defend him. He's out in the desert all by himself. Absalom's trying to take the throne away from him. He's chasing him out in the wilderness, and he's sitting under a rock, and he's crying, "Oh, God, oh, God, why do the wicked prosper? And why are You doing this? How long, oh, Lord, am I going to be here? Why don't You go in there and destroy them?" And, oh, on and on.

And then finally he'll start to think about what God's done, and he'll start to recite everything. "God, Oh, Lord, You did this. Oh, Lord, You did that. Oh, You're so high. Oh, You're so mighty. Oh, You're so glorious. Oh, I thank You for this. I thank You for that." And then when you get to the end of the Psalm, "Oh, Lord." He's terrific. He's just completely freed. He's under the same rock, Absalom's doing the same deal. He's just cultivated a whole different perspective.

And if you got trouble, and you're grumbling and griping all the time, it has nothing to do with your circumstances. It has to do with your inability to be thankful for the things God's doing that are positive. Cultivate thankfulness. Let your lips be filled with praise. In Psalm 30:4, it says we ought to "be thankful for the remembrance of *God's* holiness." In Psalm 106:1, we ought to be thankful for the goodness and mercy that He gives us.

In 2 Corinthians 9:15, we ought to be thankful for the gift of Christ. In Revelation 11:17, we ought to be thankful for Christ's power and coming kingdom. In 1 Thessalonians 2:13, we ought to be thankful for the reception and effectual working of the Word of God. In Romans 7:23-25, we ought to be thankful for the fact that Christ has delivered us from the power of indwelling sin. In 1 Corinthians 15:57, we ought to be filled with thanksgiving that we have been promised victory over death, and resurrection.

In Daniel 2:23, Daniel was thankful for "wisdom and strength." In 2 Corinthians 2:14, we should be thankful for the triumph of the gospel. In Romans 6:17, we ought to be thankful for the conversion of

other people. In Romans 1:8, we ought to be thankful for the faith exhibited by others, as Paul was. And in 2 Thessalonians 1:3, he was thankful for the love that he saw in other believers, for their hard work for the kingdom's sake. In 1 Corinthians 1:4, he was thankful for grace bestowed on others. He was thankful in 2 Corinthians 8:16 for the zeal for Christ that he saw in the lives of others.

I mean, you just cultivate and cultivate thankfulness, instead of going around moaning about how bad things are. You say, "Well, I'm not thankful, but my circumstance." No, it's not your circumstances. See, the reason you're not thankful is very simple. The reason you're not thankful is you don't think you're getting what you deserve. That's right. And if you got what you deserved, you'd be in hell, so eliminate that. You don't want what you deserve. You don't even want what you want unless you know God wants it for you. Be thankful - so many - cultivate thanks. It'll take all the sourness out of your life.

These are simple things, aren't they? Thankfulness, peace, joy, willingness to serve, unity, love, humility, obedience. Listen carefully. What I'm going to say may sound like heresy, but it isn't. Here's eight things I gave you. Now, listen. You could take any one of them, just any one of them, and if that one thing were reigning supreme in your life, all the rest would be there, too.

Just take obedience. You have an attitude of obedience, takes care of everything. Take humility. If you're humble, truly humble, selfless, then you're going to love, and then you're going to find unity. And if you love like that, you're going to serve, and out of that service is going to come joy, and out of that service and that love, a deep sense of peace, and when you have a deep sense of peace and a deep sense of joy and your life is filled with meaningful service, you're going to offer God what? Thanks.

Take love. If your life is totally dominated by love, what's going to happen? Well, in the first place, "If you love Me, you keep My - " what? " - commandments." So if you just love God, you'll obey everything, and if you just love God, you're going to be humble, and you're going to find unity, and out of that great love will come service, and joy, and peace, and thanksgiving, because you're going to thank the one you love. Isn't that true? And you're going to be joyful, and you're going to have a peace in your heart in that contented love relationship you have.

Or you could just, you could take unity. I mean, if you really sought to be one heart, one soul, knit together with every other believer - boy, I'll tell you - to do that you'd have to express love, and humility, and obedience. It's all - it doesn't matter. I mean it's almost like the Lord is saying, "Look, I'm giving you about 8,000 ways to approach this deal. Just pick any one." It's like when Galatians 5, it says, "But the fruit of the Spirit - " not fruits, but fruit " - is love, joy, peace, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, self-control." You get all or none. You can't say, "Well, my life is full of love, true love of God, love generated by the Holy Spirit. It's just that I'm miserable, wretched. I have no joy in my life." No, no. Life filled with love is going to be joy, and peace, and gentleness, and goodness. I mean, it all just comes, see. Or let's say you just decided you're going to be joyful. You're just going to cultivate joy. Out of your joy is going to come thanks, and peace, and service. I mean, you see what I'm saying? Jump in anyplace.

Well, I believe that we understand the exhortation. Let me speak a word of commendation. I praise God continuously that you are obedient, and I'm not saying you're not, and you are humble and loving, and you have a beautiful unity, a willingness to serve, joy, peace. Thanksgiving is definitely in your lives. I see it. I praise God for it. I commend you, but I only remind you to reinforce in case those

things may have slipped a little.

It's not that we don't have these things. We do. We need more of what good things we have, right? And we need more folks living this to the fullest. I want to close with a letter that I think is a wonderful blessing. You will, too. Listen.

"Today marks our family's one-year anniversary at Grace Community Church. We stepped out on faith from our home in Fort Lauderdale, Florida. Coming out West to attend Grace Church has been the most exciting year of our family's Christian life. It's like moving to California for the Gold Rush, only it's not corruptible gold we're seeking, but an incorruptible richness in the Word of God that so freely is available at Grace Church. Although we were truly growing in God's Word through your blessed radio ministry, we felt it was time that we give of ourselves in a service ministry to help the body of Christ grow at Grace Church. - " Isn't that wonderful?

"My husband and I are involved in the flocks ministry, the Union Rescue Mission, as well as serving in reception, as you know, and it is truly a joy to be a part of the church that Christ is building. Serving and getting out of it - " what? " - joy. I'm also overwhelmed at how the people, as well as the staff, have helped us to not only grow in the Lord, but to meet our various needs, such as food and clothing, and helping us find a home when we first got here.

"I haven't felt alone during our trials, because the faithful saints at Grace have truly born our burdens when we were in need. And Psalm 34 has grown to be very special to all of our family. When we were in need, we cried to the Lord, and He did hear us and deliver us out of all our troubles through the beloved saints at Grace Church. And we have tasted and seen that the Lord is good, and we are truly happy, because we all put our trust in Him.

"We have nothing but praise to our Lord for how Grace Church has ministered to us through its saints, both financially as well as spiritually. Thank you so much for loving your people enough to teach them the Word of God and to teach them how to apply the Scriptures to their lives on a daily basis. We remember without ceasing your work of faith, and labor of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the sight of God and our Father."

What kind of a church can make that kind of an impact? What kind of a church does it take to touch a family like that? That's only one of many. A church that has the right attitudes, right heart attitudes: love, humility, service, joy, peace, thankfulness, all those things. Those are the things that change a church, and a church like that is the thing that changes a world. Well, let's pray.

Father, we have come this morning with hearts filled with anticipation that You would meet us. We worship You. We lifted up Your name in our songs, and praise, and in our hearts. We looked at Your Word, and we heard You speak, and our souls were convicted. We want more to conform, dear Lord, to that perfect Man who stands in the fullness of the stature of Christ.

Fill our hearts, Father, with the good things. May we be those who are thankful, thankful for everything, everything. Joyful, peaceful, willing to serve, using our gifts wherever available. And may there be such a desire for obedience that we literally overflow with the love and the humility that marks truly committed people.

And, Lord, we know, too, that where we represent You in the world, Your Kingdom goes forward, and Your people are blessed. To that end, we pray in Christ's name. Amen.

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