

The Anatomy of the Church: The Muscles and the Flesh, Part 1

Scripture: Selected Scriptures

Code: 2029

This morning we're going to be discussing our theme of the last five weeks on "The Anatomy of a Church." The Lord has led us, I believe, into a discussion of what it is that He desires to be characteristic of His church. God has so blessed us here. God has built here, I believe, a church that desires, in the heart of its people, to be all that He would have it be. Certainly that is true in the leaders' hearts, and I know in your hearts as well. God has blessed us in unique and wonderful, wonderful ways. We are as rich in spiritual things as any church could be. And it's important for us, while we enjoy these things, to understand the foundations, to understand the, the causes, if you will, that bring about God's blessing, that allow us to receive from Him the best that He has to give. And so we're doing, as I've termed it, a little spiritual archaeology and digging back up our foundations to see what it is that we're committed to. God has given us so many new folks; and we praise Him and bless His name for them, for all of them; and many of you who have come in the past few years maybe have not had an opportunity to understand what is Grace Church, what's it really all about, what makes it different, what are we committed to. And so we've been going back and just sort of touching base with some things we know very well.

We're not trying to say new things. We're just trying to emphasize things that are foundational for us, to give us a perspective of what our church is really all about. And I think that, when we're finished—and hopefully, we'll finish next Sunday—we'll have a nice little package of tapes that we can give to folks when they come to our church, and they say, "What's this church all about? What makes this church what it is? What are the emphases of this church?" And we'll be able to say, "Here, here are the things to which we are committed."

Now, let me say, as we begin today, that I rejoice in the Lord, because I see the work of God in you; and when I speak like this to you, it isn't that I'm rebuking you because I don't see these things. It's because I see these things and want to see them continue and see them more. As Paul, when he wrote and said, "I know that nobody needs to teach you to love, because God has taught you Himself how to love; but let your love abound more and more," he says. And it's in that kind of perspective that I come to you, not to say these do not exist, but that they do, and they need more and more to exist. I guess my fear is that, as the church grows and we get further and further away from the foundational things that God used to bless us and upon which His Spirit has built, we lose touch with those things. And then we begin to decline, rather than ascend, in terms of His usefulness and His blessing. But I do see in the ministries of this church and the hearts and lives of you, His people, these virtues and graces and things that the Spirit of God has accomplished. I only want to call you to

a greater commitment to them than ever before.

And just in, in terms of letting you know how you're seen by others, I have three letters in my hand from pastors who came for our Shepherds' Conference; and they're reacting to what they saw here; and you might be interested in their reaction. This letter was written to Dick Mayhue:

"I want to take the time to thank you for your many hours of work put into arranging all of the details to bring about such a successful Shepherds' Conference. This was my third conference, and each time I have gained more insight and help in the ministry. Thank you for your faithfulness and your servant's heart that made this possible. Also, I would commend Grace Community Church and its people for their continued demonstration of a serving people to those of us who attended. One of the most singularly amazing things about Grace Church is the very spirit which permeates from the highest level of staff involvement to the people working in the kitchen. Please let those good folks know how much we appreciate the work done. Our church board has made a commitment to see to it that each one of our members attend the Shepherds' Conference and so we will be seeing you in the future. Thanks again for letting the Spirit of God lead, for extending an open door to men throughout the nation and around the world to learn more about how to apply scriptural principles in the atmosphere of the local church. May God continue to minister to you and through you."

One of the goals we have when we have a Shepherds' Conference or a radio conference is just to expose people to you, and so we encourage you to have them for dinner, to take them to your home, to keep them, to get to know them. We want them to know that there are things happening in your lives that honor the Lord Jesus Christ. We have nothing to hide. I heard the other day that, since we're going to have the Olympics in Los Angeles in 1984, there was a movement afoot in the city of Los Angeles to pick up all the bums in Los Angeles and relocate them in Newhall during the Olympics. The idea being that nobody on the outside would know we had these kind of people in our city, unless they happened to visit Newhall, which is highly unlikely. Well, when we have 250 pastors here, our idea is not to pick up all of the people in our church that we're concerned about and put them over somewhere else. We really believe that God is at work in the lives of our people; and that these who come to look at our church and find out if it really is what it is said to be and find out if the things that we advocate really do see life-changing results, we want them exposed to the people, so that those things can be verified. And this pastor who wrote that letter from Washington state was encouraged to see in the hearts of the people the realization of the things we were teaching.

I have another letter that comes from a young pastor in Mississippi. He writes:

"Just a line to say thank you for all that you've allowed God to do to me through this week. I'm learning more about God's grace, His work, and so forth through the ministries here at Grace. This week at the Shepherds' Conference has totally and forever reinforced in my spirit the commitment, joy, and desire to know my Lord through His Word, and to make Him known by His Word. Thank you

a million times [Preachers sometimes exaggerate.] for your hospitality and graciousness this week. You have all truly lived out your life's message. [What a wonderful thought: You have all truly lived out your life's message.] In precept and example you have showed the heart of a servant, and we have come to love you all deeply."

Boy, that's so encouraging. To hear someone on the outside come to Grace Church, meet our people, be here for a week, and say, "You're living out your message," the greatest commendation. And then this from a pastor in Michigan:

"While I realize you must receive many letters such as this one after each Shepherds' Conference, I still feel impressed to write and express my deep appreciation for you and the ministry at Grace. I have heard of your church since my days at Bible college, and have been eager to see your ministry. When my senior pastor agreed to send me to the conference, I immediately began to sense that the Lord was going to bless me in a very special way. He had already been working in my heart about leaving our ministry here and assuming the pastorate of my own church, yet He had not opened any doors of opportunity. Now I know why. Our teen ministry here had been viewed as very successful. Many kids have been saved, and my teaching on Sunday mornings has always been practical and need-oriented.

"However, after three-and-a-half years, my wife and I shared a discouragement based on a feeling that somehow we were missing the boat as far as true biblical ministry was concerned. Being with you and your staff showed me the basic problem. We had built tremendous relationships with our kids; and they had a real sense of excitement and commitment to our department and the church; but they didn't have a commitment to the Word of God personally or in a practical way. We had missed the basis of the ministry. The sad fact is that I don't really think we had ever been exposed to a church that, in fact, had this goal. Of course, the real root of the problem was that we ourselves were not in the Word as we should've been. Let me share with you how the Lord revealed this to us.

"During the conference, my wife and I were staying with friends. We had been asked to teach the college ministry at their church on Sunday morning; so I planned on missing your Sunday morning service. But all week I kept hearing how important it was to share in the worship. So, finally, on Saturday afternoon, I relented and told my friend that I'd be going back up to Grace Church on Sunday morning. The next morning, my wife and I entered the worship center not really knowing what to expect. You need to understand that we both tend to be somewhat skeptical toward new ideas. By the time we left the service, we both realized that we just experienced something totally foreign to our idea of the ministry. My wife summed it up best when she commented that in our churches people come to church gasping, just barely making it through the week, and anticipating another fix to take them to the next service. But it seems that with your people, they came already full, because they have been led to be in the Word for themselves. [When they came, they do so to get] When they come they do so to get more; but more particularly, to worship. I'm dismayed to say that we had never

seen that before.

"I'm thankful to say that, since that morning, our lives have been different. Daily, we have been in the Word, and when I teach or preach, I've done so verse by verse. I never knew there could be so much joy and satisfaction in the ministry. I've learned so much in such a short time. Folks have come up and asked what happened in our lives in California. It all sounds so easy, and I've heard it all my life. Unfortunately, I'd never seen it before. We're now trusting the Lord He'll soon provide a place in which we can institute some of the principles the Lord has revealed to us in a full way. Thank you so much for the revolutionary impact your ministry has had on our ministry."

And I received a letter from that young man just a month or so ago saying that he now is the pastor of his own church, and he was writing to see if we'd load him up with some things that he could use to get started. What is so wonderful about that is that what they are responding to, those men, is the total life of the church. They're not writing saying, "Oh, it was a great seminar," "It was a great class," or, "You had a profound thing to say about this or that." But there is a whole ministry to them by virtue of this church. Wednesday night, Moishe Rosen was with us, and I was in the hall talking to him before he came to speak, and he said, "I just got back from London." He's the head of Jews for Jesus, and he said, "I was in London, and I went to several places, and, at each place, there was a person who came to me and said, 'You're from California. Do you know of Grace Community Church?' And in each case I said, 'I know of it,' and they said, 'Well, could you tell us about it?'" He said, "I'm amazed how the reputation of your people has extended to everywhere I go. In fact," he says, "I'm envious that you have such a people." Well, that's a wonderful thing, and I, I said to him, "I, I pinch myself all the time and say, 'Are you sure you got the right guy here, Lord?' in this wonderful God-blessed ministry."

We have a great, great responsibility to these who look to us, to see in us that which they maybe have not seen somewhere else. And I believe there are reasons why God has blessed: I, I believe there are, there are principles that place us in the, in the position of maximum blessing. And it isn't just that we're large. It's the attitude that people catch. It's the commitments that they catch. It's, it's those things that exist in us as committed believers that they see, that they don't always see in others who name the name of Christ.

So we've been going back in our series and saying, "Well, what is it, then, that makes a church all that a church can be?" I mean, what is it that we should have? Many of you are new in our church, and you may wonder the same thing. You may want to be able to sort of line up and say, "Well, here are the things; here are the things that we need to be committed to. Here's what we need to work on. Here are the things that we want to teach and, and proclaim, and disciple in others." And so we're going back over these things. They're very basic things.

In fact, I feel like this is sort of a large "Fundamentals of the Faith" class, that, that I'm talking about very familiar territory. And I keep saying to my wife after each Sunday, "You know, it all seems so basic. It seems so basic. I, I, I hope it's, it's the right thing to do." And she assures me by saying, "Well, there are a lot of folks to whom it's not as basic as it is to you." And I need that from my wife now and then, just a little encouragement that I'm on the right track, because it seems so very, very basic. And, yet, we have to keep going back and putting that foundation down again, don't we?

I'm reminded of Peter's words, that I want to put you in remembrance of these things. Not that you don't know them. You already know them, but I want you to be sure you remember them. You have to keep on track. You know, you start down the track and, all of a sudden, you go one way, or you start to go another way. You just keep laying that same track down again, so we know where we're going. And so we've been looking, then, at the church, and we've used the analogy of a body. We said that, first of all, a church, to be what God wants it to be, has to have a skeleton. In other words, foundation, which gives it form. And, basically, we've said that there are some non-negotiable, bottom-line, foundational truths. And we suggested five of them: a high view of God, the absolute priority of Scripture, doctrinal clarity, personal holiness, and spiritual authority; and we tied those all together and that was sort of our skeleton.

Now, moving on from that into the second dimension of our analogy, we said that a body has to have internal systems flowing through it. Those are the life systems. That's what gives it its life and capability to act and react. And in the church, we have to have internal systems; and those, I believe, are right spiritual attitudes. What is flowing through the lives of the people behind the scenes is the issue. We tell pastors all the time who come and look at our church, "Don't just take what you see on the surface and try to incorporate it. Behind that, behind that flesh, if you will, there's a, there's a flowing through of certain internal attitudes that have to be built into peoples' hearts before ministry can be what God wants it to be." And I gave you a whole list of those. Let me just remind you briefly of them: obedience, humility, love, unity, service, joy, peace, thankfulness, self-discipline, forgiveness, dependence, flexibility, accountability, growth, faithfulness, and hope. I don't expect you to write all that down. You've already gotten that. But just to kind of refresh your mind. Those are the attitudes that I believe we must cultivate among ourselves by our preaching, and teaching, and *discipling*, and all that we do to build into ourselves those strong kinds of attitudes, spiritual attitude.

Now, when the skeleton is right, and the right kinds of attitudes are flowing through, we're ready to move to dimension number three. And we're going to do that today, and that is function, or the muscles in the body. The body now has form and it has life, and now what is it to do? What is its function? What, what is the church's responsibility in the world? What are we to be about? Or, in simple terms, what's our ministry? If somebody said to you, "What is the church supposed to do?" You've got a church that's committed to the worship of God, the authority of Scripture, doctrine, sound doctrine. Peoples' lives are right. They're concerned with personal holiness. They're under spiritual authority of those that God has placed over them in the Lord. They've got cultivated in their hearts the

right attitudes. They got all this power going, all this flow-through of life. What are they to do?

If you were to mandate the church as to its responsibility, what would it be? That's what we want to look at now; and I call these the muscles. This is function. This makes us move. And I want to spend today and next time on this, and then we'll just wrap up with the flesh very briefly next time also. I think we can do it in two weeks. But for this morning I want to give you four things that I believe are priority functions; and they're so basic that you know them well. But let me just refresh you, so you'll understand, maybe in a fresh way, the things we're committed to.

The first one is preaching and teaching. And I combine those two because they both have to do with the proclamation of biblical truth: preaching and teaching. That, as I see it, is the primary function of the church. The church is the receiver of the revelation of God and, therefore, the church must be the dispenser of the revelation of God. If God has revealed Himself to us, it is in order that we might understand Him. We are then to be the hearers of the Word and the proclaimers of the Word. And so, when you come here, you will hear the Word of God. When you go to a class, you will hear the Word of God. When you go to a Bible study, you will discuss and study the Word of God; because, primarily, the church is to be a place where the Word of God is preached and taught. Now, I am committed to that as an absolute priority in the church. That is a function of the church. We must be about proclaiming the Word of God. I, I kind of grieve in my heart over the, a lot of sermonizing that goes on. And some of it is helpful. Some of it is good, a lot of, sort of, I call it counseling from the pulpit that goes on. There are a lot of sort of ethical issues that are dealt with in the church. There are a lot of little classes that meet together where everybody pools their ignorance, because nobody knows anything. They just sort of guess what the Bible means. But the church has, as a priority function, the clear, understandable, direct, authoritative proclamation of the Word of God. And so Grace Church will always be committed to a strong emphasis on preaching and teaching, a strong emphasis on preaching and teaching.

Now look, look with me for a moment at two epistles written by Paul to Timothy. Now these epistles were written, I think, to help us understand the ministry, both from the viewpoint of the minister and his congregation. In fact, it even tells us in 1 Timothy 3:15 that this epistle was written to teach us how to behave in the house of God, which is the church. So here is an epistle that is to tell us how we are to behave in the church, how we are to function in the church, how we are to operate in the church. And I believe the emphasis of both 1 Timothy and 2 Timothy is that we are to operate primarily in the area of proclaiming sound doctrine, preaching the Word of God. That same chapter, 1 Timothy 3 verse 16 is an interesting verse; and it sums up the wonder of the incarnation of Jesus Christ. It says that, without controversy, that is, without any debate or argument, it's an incontrovertible fact that the mystery of godliness is a great thing. And what is the mystery of godliness? That God was manifest in the flesh. That's just an incredible thing. No one's going to argue that that is a great truth, right? That God was manifest in the flesh. That's the heart, the core, that's the substance of our Christian faith, isn't it? We don't have anything if God didn't manifest Himself in the flesh of Jesus Christ, right? Die

and rise again. So that is at the very heart of our faith. Without any argument, that is a great, great revealed truth. But notice what it says. "He was manifest in the flesh. He was justified in the Spirit. He was seen of angels. He was believed on in the world. He was received up into glory," and then tucked in the middle, "preached unto the nations." And if I look at that 16th verse of 1 Timothy 3, I see some essential things in the incarnation, and one of them is preaching. Preaching is an essential element in God manifesting Himself in the flesh. What happened must be preached. That's what he's saying. There must be proclamation of the message. Preaching is unique to Christianity; and it's the one marvelous thing that the church does, that holy men of God do, that nothing in the world can match. I mean, the world can have its movies, and they can have their, their books, and the world can have lots of different means to communicate. But preaching, it seems to me, is something so very unique, as men of God who are given gifts of the Spirit and the knowledge of the Word proclaim its truth. And I believe, therefore, at the heart of the church is the incarnation; and at the heart of the incarnation is the proclamation of that incarnation. And so preaching finds a central place in the life of the church.

Now, it follows, then, that Paul is going to emphasize to young Timothy, as he moves out in his ministry, that he, indeed, should be faithful to the preaching. And you'll notice in verse 6 of chapter 4 that, right away Paul says, "If you put the brethren in remembrance of these things..." And he's just talked to them, to him about some things, and he says, "Your job is to put your people in remembrance of these things. You're, first of all, a teacher, Timothy. You're a teacher. Whatever you've received from God's Spirit, you give it out; and let the church be the place where things are taught." The truth of God is taught. You know how marvelous that is in a world where people are groping for truth? You understand that? You know how wonderful it is in a place where people have just about given up on anything that can be guaranteed as being true? Where it's morality by majority? Where it's everybody for himself and whatever opinion you want? Where truth is elusive? Where men are left with their own inane philosophy to try to figure out meaning in life? We can stand up and say, "This is truth." I mean, even Pilate, the ultimate cynic of the New Testament said, "What is truth? What is truth?" We know the truth. We know the truth. Jesus said in John 17 to the Father, "Thy Word is truth." Oh, what a legacy! And that's what we must impart. That's what we must impart.

And God has blessed this church, I believe, because its primary function has always been, in part, to proclaim the truth, the Word of God. Not to talk about the Bible, but to talk from the Bible. And I can't tell you how many hundreds, even thousands of people through the years have spoken to us or written to us and said they come to Grace Church because they're fed the Word of God. It's always what we hear. And that's our commitment. That's our function, and it isn't just my job. It's everybody's job. We're all to be those who proclaim and preach and teach the Word. Some gifted, of course, uniquely. Verse 11, following up the same thought of chapter 4 verse 6, he says, you are a minister who is a good minister, if you, yourself, are nourished up in the, the words of the faith and, and the sound doctrine. In other words, if you've got the truth in, and you're giving it to your people, he says in verse 11, "Command them and teach them." In other words, teach with authority. Teach with authority.

I remember I was doing the commencement at the Police Academy one time; and the fellow that I was sitting next to was talking to me about the various graduates who were graduating from the Los Angeles Police Academy; and he said, "We had to flunk one fellow out because of his voice." I said, "That's interesting." He said, "Yeah, you just can't go up behind a robber and say, 'Stick 'em up. You're under arrest. Halt in the name of the law.'" I mean it just leaves something out, doesn't it? And I said, "Well, that's interesting." "Yeah," he said, "there had to be a certain authority in his voice." And I began to think about the fact that his authority, basically, was the law, right? The law was his authority; and if I sound like I speak with authority, I do, because the authority's the Word of God. I will not speak authoritatively on my opinion, but I'll speak authoritatively on the Word of God; and that's what he's saying here in 1 Timothy 4:11: You, you don't just teach it. You command it. In other words, you call people to a, to a mandate of responsibility.

And so verse 16, he says, or verse 13, rather, he says, "Until I come, give your attention to reading, exhortation, and doctrine." Then he tells him how to do it: Read the text, explain the text, and apply the text. Reading: That's just read it to them. Exhortation: That's, apply it. Doctrine: That's give them the doctrine or the teaching. So he says, you get the text open. You read it to them. You explain to them. That's doctrine, and you exhort them to behave. And don't neglect, in verse 14 says, don't neglect it. Meditate on it, verse 15 says. Take heed to it, verse 16 says, and you continue in it. In other words, we are all called to obey the Word and proclaim the Word: Preaching, teaching, proclaiming, instructing. What a thrilling responsibility.

Now, in chapter 5, verse 17, he comes to another dimension. "Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double," time, double pay, double respect, probably embraces all those things. But ones who, who do well should be doubly honored, "especially those who work hard in preaching and teaching." Again, the focus of leadership in the church is on the preaching and the teaching role. That's our function. That's our function. That's our function.

We're here to proclaim God's Word. I've heard people criticize Grace Church and say, "Well, Grace Church is, is over-balanced in the area of teaching. There's too much preaching, too much teaching, and not enough of this or that or the other thing." You, you, I don't see that you could ever have too much of that. I mean, unless you have mastered all of God's revelation, and that's a, an utter impossibility, there can't be too much. It could be out of balance if we didn't obey the teaching. But the reason we dominate our lives with teaching is because teaching is what sets everything else in motion. We have to know what the Bible says about a certain thing before we can carry it out. And so teaching is, is the sine qua non of everything. We have to know what to do. We, we can't know how to worship unless we know what the Bible says. We can't know how to pray unless we know what the Bible says. We can't know how to evangelize. We can't know how to disciple or shepherd. We can't know how to train people. We, we can't know how to help people and their families. We can't do anything unless we understand what God says. So we preach, we teach, we preach, we teach.

The end of chapter 6, Paul says to Timothy, "Keep that which is committed." In other words, I think he's referring to the, the deposit of truth, the revelation of God, the faith, if you will, the content of true doctrine. Keep it and stay away from the garbage of the world, the philosophies and the errant theologies and the supposed knowledge of men who really don't know anything at all. Hang in there with the right stuff. We don't want to get deviated away from it. We don't want to get pushed away into the thoughts of men that are afar from God. Second Timothy deserves a brief look, verse 15 of chapter 2. He says, "Be diligent to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needs not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth." In other words, you've got the Word. You're committed to it. Now handle it correctly.

Back in verse 13 of chapter 1, he says, "Hold fast the form of sound words." So the first thing you do is you hold onto it, and then you rightly dispense it. You hang onto the truth and you dish it out as it ought to be, so that you may be approved of God. And again he says in 16 and following, "Stay away from the garbage of the world. Stay away from their errors and heresies and philosophies, and stick to the truth of God." Down in verse 24 of chapter 2, he says anyone who leads in the church, who's a servant of the Lord, should be skilled in his teaching, skilled in his teaching. And, of course, that great passage in chapter 3 where it says that all Scripture is inspired, that we may be perfected. So you can see, then, as Paul instructs Timothy regarding the church, this tremendous emphasis is made on preaching and teaching.

Now go to chapter 4, and we'll draw it all together. Chapter 4 of 2 Timothy, verse 1, and here is a, here is a mandate, given to Timothy, one of the really great ones in the New Testament. "I charge thee," or I hold thee accountable, or I command thee this therefore. Since the Word of God can perfect; since the Word of God can save, as it says in 3:15 to 17; since the Word of God can do all these things; since it can give you the salvation that you've received; since it can give you all that you need to be perfected in Christ, then, "I charge you before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the living and dead at His appearing in His kingdom." That's a very solid charge. He says, I hold you accountable before God and Jesus Christ. I hold you accountable before the, the Father and Son. Verse 2, do what? What? "Preach the Word." "Preach the Word." It is the Word that makes people wise unto salvation. It is the Word that perfects, that brings doctrine, reproof, correction, instruction in righteousness; that makes the man of God thoroughly furnished unto all good works. It is the Word that does that, so he says, "Timothy, sum it up simple: I hold you accountable to God the Father. I hold you accountable to God the Son. Man, preach the Word. Proclaim the Word, and be diligent at it. Work hard at it. Hang in there. Do it in season and out of season, when it seems appropriate and inappropriate. When it seems like somebody might be offended or not, you keep doing it, all the time." "In season, out of season," means all the time. You can't be any more than either in season or out of season.

And then he says this, and it's interesting, isn't it? He doesn't say comfort and encourage. He says, "Reprove, rebuke, and exhort." In other words, "Lay it on them, Timothy." Why does he say that? Because he knows that even Christians basically have to fight with their sin, right? And so he says preaching has to be confrontive. It has to be reproof. It has to be rebuking. It has to be exhorting. And the mildest of those words is exhortation, and it means to encourage to a change of behavior in view of judgment if they don't. In other words, you keep going the way you're going, God's going to have to deal with you. So preaching has to have that element in it. It's confrontive. It pulls you up short. It's convicting. It's heart searching. It's heartbreaking. And that's what he tells him. "Preach it that way, and let the content of your ministry be that which demonstrates long suffering." So you preach with great zeal. You preach with great conviction. You confront people. You sort of slam them to the wall, and they've got to decide yes or no to what you said. You make them look at their own heart, see the failure of their own life, and realize this: that they're not going to change overnight. So in the process be what? Patient. Be patient.

And then he says, not only be patient, but in this process, he says, and this is such an important word, do it "with all patience and doctrine." Teaching, the heart of the ministry, beloved, is patiently teaching the Word of God in a confrontive way that pulls people up short in self-examination, so that their life can be brought to accountability before God. That's the function of the church. That's the function of the church. When you come here, you're called to that accountability. When you go to a fellowship group, one of the things you're called to in the teaching of the Word of God is: Am I responding rightly to this Word? You go to a flock or a Bible study, and somebody opens up the Bible, and you're, you're called by the authority of the Word of God to the place where you say, "I'm doing that, or I'm not doing that." And you're reprove, reproved, or rebuked, or exhorted, and patiently so, until your life can be what God would have it to be.

So, as Paul bows out and Timothy steps in to take his mantle, he says, "Timothy, it's all summed in this, son. Preach the Word. Preach the Word." Say, "Why so?" Because it's the Word in the mind that generates the behavior. It's the Word that comes into the mind that generates the behavior. And that's why the Bible says in Ephesians 4:23, "Be renewed in the spirit of your mind." Be renewed in the spirit of your mind. Transformation, Romans 12: "Be not conformed to this world, but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind." And that's your thinking part. You have to have the Word into your thinking, so that it can start that flywheel of behavior moving. And so we teach and preach the Word; no substitute for that.

A second function is evangelism and mission, evangelism and missions. We, and I use those two terms just to give you a comprehensive perspective. Evangelism seems to speak of personal things and missions seems to speak of something very large. And so, since those terms are thought of in that way, we'll use them. We are to be committed to the fact that our church is not only for its own sake, but for the sake of the world, right? That the reason we want to be what God wants us to be is so that we can be a shining light in the midst of a dark and perverse generation. We want to be all

that God wants us to be so that He can, through us, reach others. You see, the ultimate goal of all ministry is that we would reach someone for Christ; and so we've got to be about evangelism, evangelism, evangelism. We've got to be about it basically two ways: by life example and by word. And as we've said so many times, people, it's our lives out there that make our testimony either believable or unbelievable. I mean if we have a church where Christ is exalted, where people are living righteous lives, where they're dealing with their sin in honesty before God, where they're endeavoring to walk in obedience in His holy purposes, if we have that kind of church, then we're going to lay out a platform on which individual testimony can be believed.

It's what you are out there in the world. That's what's so wonderful when people come here and they say, "Hey, your people live your message. Your people really do obey the Word of God." That's so thrilling, because that makes Christianity so credible, see. I mean why do you think that, instead of Satan just coming into the world and just blasting churches out existence, he comes into the world and proliferates churches all over the place who have no credibility? Because that undermines the whole message. I mean how people say, "Oh, I went to a church over there. That was really some place. They have a lot of hypocrites there, so forth and so forth and so on. They don't care about anybody over there. Why, the pastor ran off and did this. He was crooked. He embezzled money out of the church and blah-blah-blah." You see, all that Satan can do to keep the church going in name and to corrupt it is done in a way that undermines the integrity of the message of the church. Satan doesn't want to eliminate churches. He just wants to corrupt them so that there's no foundation on which individual testimony can be believed. And I really believe that we have been called to live a life in the community that is a life of, of evangelism.

It's summed up—you know, we've gone through this in years past—in Matthew 5, where our Lord says you are two things. "You are the salt of the earth," Matthew 5:13, and if the salt, "if the salt's lost its savor, with what shall it be salted?" You're the salt of the earth. I mean you're just out there as a preservative. You're, you're just out there as a deterrent. You're out there distinct. You have a flavor different than they do. I mean you're out there unique. And that's why, see, beloved, that's why we call people to a separated life. That's why we call people to a pure life. That, that's why I'm so exercised in my spirit that you live a godly, virtuous, holy, righteous life. Not just for the glory of God from the viewpoint of you, but for the glory of God from the viewpoint of others who see and are drawn to that kind of purity. Where you can be used as an example, you're the salt.

And then in verse 14, "You're the light of the world." And if the light is hidden under a bushel, isn't going to be seen. And the bushel, I'm sure, is an indication of sin or clouding of the testimony of your life. But if you're out there, and you're shining bright, and you're salt that's really salty, now you're going to have an impact on the world. And it's by what you are before it is what you say. "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who's in Heaven."

I mean, I'm amazed sometimes. You know, I, I meet a lot of people in a lot of interesting circumstances; and some of them are very embarrassed in the circumstances that they meet me; because I say, "Oh, don't I know you?" So I can't tell you how many people have tried to swallow a cigarette when they saw me. It's really funny, really funny. I mean, "Well, hello." Gulp. *Unk-dink*, you know? Oh, I can, I can be in a restaurant and, and somebody will have a drink; and they'll get it up just a little ways, and I'll just smile and wave, and instant panic sets in. I didn't say a thing. I've, on some occasions, even gone over to a table and greeted them just as a reminder that there is, for Christians, a certain standard of, of life for the sake of those who watch us. I remember in a restaurant one time. Sometimes when you go and you're waiting, there's a cocktail waitress who comes; and this cocktail waitress came; and she walked up and said, "Would you like a—No, you wouldn't, would you?" And I said, "No, I wouldn't. You look familiar." And then, "Oh, I, I have to apologize. You see, I, I," and on she went with this story. But it was very interesting because, in her heart, she knew that she was completely out of sync with the reality of where she should've been as a Christian just living in the world, and it was embarrassing to her to see me. And I thought to myself, "It should more offend her that unbelievers see her doing something that's not like Christ than that I should see it. I can handle it."

We have a foundation of credibility to lay with our lives, and it's so very important; and so he sums it up, doesn't he, in Matthew 5:16 when he says, "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who's in Heaven." You know, they ought to look at your life and say, "Look, only God could make a life like that. I mean only God could do that to somebody." What a wonderful life; and so we lay a foundation of evangelism.

And then, beyond that, we need to talk. We need to speak. We need to proclaim the message. I mean, we need to be ready to speak, to give an answer for the hope that is in us, to proclaim Jesus Christ. We need to have our lips unsealed. Someone once said that most Christians are like the Artic River, frozen over at the mouth. And it's unfortunate that, in many cases, that is true; for some reason, resistant to speak. Oh, how we ought to be as eager to speak about the Lord as we are to speak about some other mundane, inane thing; and so that we understand the responsibility to evangelize, to witness, to reach out. Part of that is having people that we know who aren't Christians, and that's hard for some of us, very hard; because our world is narrowed. Someone said it's like a pyramid. The higher you go, the, the fewer people you know that aren't Christians.

And then, too, as we proclaim, we want to make sure we have the right message; and that's why we spend so much time articulating the Gospel here, making sure you understand the terms that Christ has given. That's why, when we get to the rich, young ruler, we spend time seeing how Christ evangelized, or the Sermon on the Mount, what did He call men from and what did He call them to, and what are the real Biblical terms of evangelism? Because I know full well the churches of our country and our world are filled with people who aren't saved, but think they are.

And so we are committed to evangelism: now beyond that, to missions. I mean, that's a worldwide view to, to reaching way beyond here to whatever God will allow us to do across the globe. I received a letter this week from a pastor in the Philippines. He said, "I, I've been hearing about your church. I want to build my church as God would have it built; and could you send me some help so that I can begin to move in the right direction?" And we have people now strategizing and setting a vision for us to reach as far beyond our own walls as we possibly can. Worldwide as much as the Lord allows, because He said to go into all the world, didn't He? And we want to go as far as we can go, as far as our resources allow us to go. And what we're doing here is training up people here so that we can go more effectively. And we're committed to that, to going, to preaching, baptizing, teaching, as far as we can go.

There's a third of these functions, and you know this one well, so I'm not going to spend a lot of time: Worship, corporate worship. We've done a series recently. I hope you've read the book *The Ultimate Priority* on worship. We are called to corporate worship. "We are those who worship the Lord in Spirit, who have no confidence in the flesh," Paul says to the Philippians. We're "true worshipers" John 4, "who worship the Father in Spirit and truth." We have been called as those who are like priests, who offer our bodies a living sacrifice to God in a holy act of worship, spiritual sacrifice. We are worshipers. We are a priesthood who offer up sacrifices unto God, says Peter.

We were talking the other day in one of our staff meetings about the concern we have. There are many people who come to the worship service, but how many of them really worship? How many hearts are really lifted up to God? How many hearts are filled with praise and adoration? And how many are thinking about when it's going to be over or what they're going to do today, or where they're going tomorrow or, or whatever. And we get so blasted and bombarded by the cleverness of Satan's media in the world. We see images of pictures in our minds, and we hear jingles of commercials, and we're blasted by the things that we continually see passing before our eyes. And to try to sit down and get the clutter out of there and to meditate on the things of God, you'd almost have to go into a monastery to filter your brain clean again.

So how hard is it, is it for us to come and to really think of the songs we're singing, and to hear the Psalm when it's read and calls us to worship, and to meditate on the things of God that come through the teaching and the preaching? But we need to cultivate that. We need to be a worshiping people, not just here. This is just a catalyst to get us to worship at all times. As we tried to say some months ago in that series, we worship best when we obey most. We worship best when we respond to God in willing obedience, so that obedience is the, is the basic definition of worship. We obediently offer in praise. We obediently do what He says. Obedience and worship, synonymous in a sense, become, then, a way of life rather than just an exercise on Sunday.

But I believe we're called to draw near unto God. You know what that means? To draw near unto God; Hebrews says, "Draw near unto God." James talks about drawing near unto God, "and He'll draw near unto you." What great thoughts those are. I mean when do you really draw near unto God in an unhurried way? And when do you just let your heart and mind ascend, as it were, in the words of the hymns and in the words of Scripture or in times of deep devotion and prayer? When do you meditate? The word almost has no meaning to us except to see some strange guru squatting somewhere. We don't understand what it is to meditate; but I believe we are, we function in worship. We function in worship.

Timothy, Paul said to Timothy, you know, let holy men lift up their hands in prayer and let the church come together for that expressed purpose of praise. We are to be a worshiping people; and it thrills my heart that so many, many, like this young man who wrote from Michigan. They come to our church, and they've never experienced a worship like this. Their hearts have always been ready, but they've never been provided that kind of environment that can lift that heart to God; and maybe we could do better than we do. Maybe we could do better.

Here's a last function that the church must be given to that I want to talk about this morning. We'll finish it next time. And that's prayer, and I don't need to say much about this. I just need to remind you. I just want to place it in your memory. I don't want to gild the lily, except to say that I believe, beloved, I believe this with all my heart. Prayer's the hardest spiritual exercise we engage in for two reasons. Reason number one: It's hard work. It's hard work because it's selfless. True prayer extends to embrace the kingdom of God. "Thy name be hallowed. Thy will be done. Thy kingdom come." It extends to embrace the kingdom of God, and it extends to embrace the people of God. "Give us this day our daily bread. Forgive us our trespasses. Lead us not into temptation." There's no "I" in the disciple's prayer of Matthew 6:9 to 12. It embraces the kingdom of God in His glory. It embraces the needs of His people, and so prayer is unselfish exercise. Only unselfish, only humble people can abandon themselves to embrace the, the will of God, the kingdom of God, the needs of people.

And when Paul says in Ephesians 6:18, praying always for all saints, with all prayer and supplication, he is calling us to the kind of prayer that turns outward from us to embrace God's glorious purposes and the needs of God's people. And it's selfless, and so it's limited to selfless people. It's hard work, because you are there, and you're pouring out your heart on behalf of God, on behalf of God's redeemed people, on behalf of His purposes and their needs; and you're beyond yourself.

We find, on the other hand, prayer very easy when it hits us. When we have a disabling injury, or when we have a debilitating sickness in the family, or we lose a loved one, or when one of our children strays from the Lord, or when our kids are making decisions about who they're going to marry, or about when some tragedy comes in, or we're caught in some dishonest deed, or some immoral act; and, immediately, because we are at stake, we find ourselves rather easily drawn to prayer on our own behalf. But that doesn't demonstrate the strength of prayer. That demonstrates the

weakness of prayer. The strength of prayer is to abandon my life in unceasing prayer on behalf of the extension and glory of God in His eternal kingdom, and the needs of His redeemed people beyond myself, you see. And that's why it's so hard. I mean I don't have any question that in Luke 11, I could be the guy banging on the door, getting the bread, if I was hungry; and I'd bang all night till the guy gave me the bread to get rid of me. The question is, "Can I bang on the door all night for the bread for somebody else?" That's the question.

I mean we can have a Sunday night deal and have ice cream, and you'll have three thousand people over there gobbling up ice cream. You can have, you can call a prayer meeting, and you have to get binoculars to find the folks, you see, because prayer is so selfless. It, it, it, it's an embracing of things other than ourselves in its purest, truest sense. I'm not saying you don't pray. I'm not saying I don't pray. I don't pray as I ought to pray, and, and we all feel like we don't, don't we? We're going to have a monthly prayer meeting on a Wednesday night each month, and we're going to call the folks to prayer, and I believe God answers prayer. I said in an interview on the radio in Chicago yesterday that one of the benefits of growing older, and there are some, is that you begin to have a longer list of things that God has demonstrated in His power to answer prayer. And the older you get, the more you see God do things that only He could do. And the longer that list becomes, the more confident you become in your prayers. So I think older people pray better than younger people, at least in that sense, because they have the track record of the proving of God's response.

The second reason that prayer's difficult, not only because it's selfless, is because it's so private. It's so private, and this is sort of like the selfless idea; but, when you pray, you pray all by yourself and no one knows. And so you've got to have the self-discipline and the strength to do it without peer pressure or approval. I mean there are a lot of things we do because we know people will know we did them, right? I mean we go to Bible study because people will say, "He goes to Bible study." And we read the Bible because somebody's going to say, "Hey, I've been reading so." "Well, I've been reading so and so." "Boy, the other day I read so and so. Yeah." And you read it just so you could make sure that when the conversation came up, you could say you read it.

You see, prayer is difficult, first of all, because it's selfless and, secondly, because it has no visible rewards; and you don't have any peer pressure. Nobody sees you perform, and we perform much better when we know people are going around. Listen, I, I really prepare for sermons, because I got all these people listening. I find it much easier not to pray. In Acts 6:4, it says the apostles gave themselves continually to prayer and to ministry of the Word. I find it much easier to give myself to the ministry of the Word than prayer, because I don't have a whole lot of choice about the ministry of the Word. If I show up here on Sunday, haven't got anything to say, I'm in real trouble. But I can not pray and no one will know. Oh, eventually, you'd know; but you wouldn't know right away; and that's why prayer's such hard work. That's why the Bible talks about prevailing in prayer; because it's something that, first of all, is selfless and, secondly, has no visible rewards on the spot in terms of the affirmation and the approval of people.

I thank God for those selfless people who pray; and I pray God that we'll have more of them in our fellowship. We have a little group of people that pray on Monday, little group, older people. They're getting older all the time, but the Lord isn't letting them die because I don't know who'd take their place. It's a handful of people. They've been praying for years, over ten years. And they pray, and God hears and answers their prayers, and we cash in on their faithfulness. God help us to be faithful in our prayers. As I've said in the past, prayer is the nerve that moves the muscles of omnipotence. I don't understand how it works. I just know God hears and answers prayer. And "the effectual, fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much," says James. And I want to be that righteous man who prays, because I want to see God do all He can possibly do and give Him all the glory. So we must be committed to prayer.

And Paul couldn't have said it any more clearly than he said it in 1 Thessalonians 5, and he says in verse 17, "Pray without [What?] ceasing." We say, "What does that mean?" Well, it simply means that you pray all the time, which is to say you live in God-consciousness, that all, your whole life is offered as a prayer. You, all your whole life, is offered as a prayer. You just, you, all the time, you're aware of God, all the time, you think, you act, you respond, you talk, aware that God is there. Every, every act of life, every thought of life is offered as a prayer as if to say, "I'm going to do this. Is this all right, Lord? Oh, I see You in that." In other words, you interpret life as if you were looking through the very mind and heart of God. It isn't that you go around mumbling and with your eyes closed. Prayer is just the way of living in the conscious presence of, of God, so that everything is offered to Him. Everything is communed with Him. Prayer is two thing, a two-way thing, you know? You hear His voice. You feel the leading of the Spirit of God. You offer Him your petitions and your thoughts and your joys and your problems. It's living life in a God-conscious way. And so our functions are very, very foundational. Preach and teach. Evangelize and extend to the world. Worship. Pray. I'll give you the rest of them next time. Let's pray together.

What can we say, Lord? What can we say? You have blessed us so much. You've blessed us with salvation. You've blessed us with the Word, the Spirit. You've blessed us with the assembly of Your redeemed and beloved people. You've blessed us with friends, with family, with life partners who love you. You've blessed us with a wonderful place where we can fellowship and worship. You've blessed us with beautiful songs we can sing, instruments to which we listen, which cause our hearts to rejoice. You've blessed us with the beauty of your creation, which we, who are redeemed alone can fully appreciate as a gift of Your love, unlike the world who thinks it's some cosmic accident. You've given us so much. Father, it's our desire as Grace Community Church to function as You would have us function, preaching, teaching, evangelizing, worshiping, praying. Right back to those basic things, and to know that it isn't so important what the programs are. It's only so important what we do, as individuals, to be faithful in these areas. Thank You for sharpening our focus in these days. May we be faithful to respond as we see the truth. We pray in Christ's name. Amen.

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