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

Christ: The Head of the Church
Scripture: Selected Scriptures
Code: 2029B

As we come again this morning to...a study of the Word of God, we come to the final message in our very special series on "The Anatomy of a Church."...And in concluding the series, we have really come to the most important message. We've tried to see the church in the analogy of a body...We've talked about the skeleton, basic foundational truths the church must be committed to. We've talked about the internal systems, spiritual attitudes that must exist in the hearts of its people. We've talked about muscle, the function of ministry; and we've talked about flesh, the form that ministry takes. But no body would be complete without its head; and so in our study this morning, I want us to look to the Word of God to gain an understanding of the head of the body who is none other than the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now, we've been saying an awful lot about the things that we are to do in the church; and you've responded so wonderfully to these things. It's been a great encouragement to me, tremendous encouragement; and you've heard the things that were very confrontive and very direct and very moving on our hearts; and I have seen the spirit of God bear fruit already in these areas; and we really have majored for seven weeks on what we are to be doing, what we are to be believing, what we are to be thinking, what we are to be planning; and it would be very much out of balance if we didn't come to talk about the head, who is Jesus Christ, and what He is doing in His church.

And this, by the way, beloved, is the ultimate comfort. You see, the ultimate comfort is to know that with all of the things that we do and do so inadequately, with all of the things that we fail to do, with all of the mistakes that we make, and all of the sins that so easily beset us in the...in the race to do the will of God, we have this overriding confidence that Christ is building His church. That is a tremendous encouragement, and we wanna talk about that. Paul talked about it. In Ephesians chapter 4, he said that, "We all are growing up into Him who is the Head that is Christ." Then he said this, listen, "From Him the whole body joined and held together by every supporting ligament grows and builds itself up in love as each part does its work."

In other words, Paul said, "We have to give everything we've got. We have to endeavor to do all we can do and be all we can be in the full knowledge that it is really the power of Christ that makes it all work; and this, again, beloved, is the divine paradox, isn't it? We give supreme effort, and if anything is done, it is of God; and it is supreme comfort to know that where we fail, He succeeds; and so I want this morning for us to focus on the One who is our head, without Whom we can do what? "Nothing," says Paul, "nothing."

And as I was thinking of a passage we might examine, I was drawn to the majestic benediction at the conclusion of the epistle to the Hebrews. Would you turn in your Bibles to Hebrews 13 verses 20 and 21? And I really wanna use this verse as just a point of contact with truth to move us about some other passages in the New Testament that will enrich our understanding of the work of the Lord for His church.

We've talked for seven weeks about what we're to do. Now we're gonna talk about what Christ does for His church. And really this should be a series of its own; but we're pressed to condense it into one message. It is, by the way, a majestic doxology. It's just dropped into the closing words of this great epistle; and it says, "Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant make you perfect in every good work to do His will, working in you that which is well pleasing in His sight through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen."

Beautiful doxology. Beautiful benediction. But in a...in a ...in a way, that benediction wraps up in a summary form the work of Christ. In fact, it even wraps up in a summary form the message of the epistle to the Hebrews, but we'll not look at it particularly in that regard. The doxology is intended as a closing praise for the God of peace; and He is so-called because, through the blood of Jesus Christ, He has made peace with sinful men. He is the God of peace who once was the God of wrath, the God of war, the God of judgment, the God of fury; but He has become to us the God of peace, so always a God of peace but, to us, He becomes the God of peace through the blood of Jesus Christ when we make peace and He makes peace with us. And so it is a doxology to praise the God of peace; but in praising the God of peace, it delineates how He became the God of peace through the work of Jesus Christ.

It starts with the affirmation that He is the God of peace. It ends with a statement that He is to be glorified for ever and ever, and the means to that is in the middle, the work, the wonderful work of the Lord Jesus Christ. What does Christ do for His church? Well, it's...it's here...in this passage that we get a glimpse of that...as we begin to look at it.

First of all, He is the Savior of His church. He is the Savior of His church. Several things in this text point to the saving work of Christ in behalf of His church. The first one that I noted was His name Lord Jesus in verse 20. "Jesus...was to be His name...says Matthew 1:21...You shall call His name Jesus for he shall...what?...save His people from their sins." That name means...means Jehovah Saves. It is Jeshua or Joshua of the Old Testament. It means Jehovah Saves. So His very name is the name of one who saves. Earlier, the writer of Hebrews in chapter 2 and verse 9 and 10 wrote, "But we see Jesus...who is made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honor, that He by the grace of God should taste death for every man. For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to make the Captain

of their salvation perfect through suffering."

Jesus is the one who tasted death for every man. Jesus is the one who became the archegos, the pioneer, the captain, the leader, the trailblazer, the beginner of salvation...and He was made perfect in His own offering of Himself. In fact, the name Jesus speaks of our salvation so much so that the writer in Acts 4:12 says there is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved," than the name of Jesus. So His very name here speaks of His saving work; and so there is a praise note here as the benediction begins in just the name Jesus, the Savior; but there's much more.

For verse 20 says that He had done His saving work, "Through the blood of the everlasting covenant." That's a marvelous phrase. "The blood of the everlasting covenant." You see, the Jews always knew that sin had to be atoned for by blood. There was no other way; and that's part of the message of this Book of Hebrews. Back in chapter 9 and verse 18, we read this, "Whereupon neither the first covenant or the first testament...that is the old one under Moses...was dedicated without blood."

Every Jew knew that the ratification of the old covenant in Leviticus 17:11 was by blood...The old covenant was inaugurated and ratified by the shedding of blood, because it was by God's design that there had to be bloodshed to deal with sin. Moses was God's agent to sprinkle that blood, to ratify that covenant, to set it in motion; "For when Moses had spoken every precept to all the people according to the law, he took the blood of calves and goats with water and scarlet wool and hyssop and sprinkled both the book and all the people, saying, 'This is the blood of the covenant or testament which God has enjoined unto you. Moreover he sprinkled with blood both the tabernacle and all the vessels of the ministry." Now, God is making a very major point here. There was blood everywhere, blood all over the book of the law, blood all over the people. There was blood all over the tabernacle, and all the vessels in the tabernacle. It was a bloody mess, blood every place; and God was saying that, "There is no covenant made with Me without the shedding of blood." But all of that was only symbolic of the ultimate bloodshed that could bring men to peace with God. Right?...

And so it says in verse 22, "Almost all things are by the law purged with blood, and without shedding of blood is... what?...no remission." No forgiveness, no peace with God. That's why Jesus ratified the new covenant, Matthew 26:28 by saying this, "This is blood of the covenant which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins." And He was, in effect, saying that, "My blood will be the inaugurator of a new covenant." So covenants were made in blood; and if a man was to have peace with God, it would be through the shedding of blood, and no animal sacrifice could effect that true peace. There had to be the ultimate sacrifice of Christ of which the animal sacrifices were only previews and pictures.

And if you look again at what it says in Hebrews 13:20, it says it is "the blood of the everlasting covenant." The Mosaic covenant, the old covenant was not everlasting. It was a temporary covenant. It was only a shadow of things to come. It is replaced by the everlasting covenant, "For Jesus Christ, in one offering, perfected forever them that are sanctified. He by that one act of sacrifice brought about an everlasting salvation."

In Hebrews 9:12, it says, "Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by His own blood, He entered in once into the Holy Place, having obtained eternal redemption." And the priest went in again and again and again and again, and there was sacrifice after sacrifice after sacrifice. Christ went in once, came out, never again and He purchased for us eternal redemption, eternal redemption.

So we see in this passage that He's the Savior of His church. That's His name, and that was His work on the cross. And then we see also another phrase there at the beginning of verse 20, when it says, "The God of peace brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus." That's also is a very essential element in His saving work, for when the Father brought Jesus from the dead, it was the Father's stamp of approval on His finished work. We think of the resurrection as a means to our own resurrection. We think of the resurrection as a conquering of death which we, too, shall enjoy; and those are right ways to think; but they are not all encompassing. We must look at the resurrection of Jesus Christ as the single greatest affirmation of God's approval upon His saving work. When He raised Him from the dead, He was affirming that He had accomplished what He had gone to the cross to do.

And so the saving work of Christ comes to us very clearly through verse 20. Jesus, through His blood, brings us into an everlasting covenant; and, in response, the God of peace raises Him from the dead; and it is Christ who is, Paul says in Ephesians 2, "Our peace." He is our peace. He has made peace. In Colossians 1:20, it says, "Through the blood of His cross," and I think that's why in Luke 10, I think it's verse 6, we are called, "sons of peace." So He's the Savior of His church.

Now, beloved, lemme say what this means. This church is not a human organization, nor is any church of Jesus Christ. You don't get into this church by signing up. You don't just become a member because you like the kinda folks that hang out here or you think it might be good for business or it might sort of upgrade your lifestyle or you might like to get in on some of the fun things that we do or you might enjoy the music or it sorta makes you feel better about yourself. No, you come into the church by virtue of the sacrificial death of the Lord Jesus Christ; and entrance belongs to those who are redeemed and washed through His precious blood. We're not building the church. He's building it. It's His church. He's the Savior of His church. He brings people into His church.

Let's talk about that. There are two elements in that that I wanna speak to. First, He loves His church. His saving work is built upon His saving love. We love Him, because He first loved us. It is God who predetermined the love relationship with us before we ever existed and loved us while we hated Him;

and even when we were enemies, God, through His great love, reconciled us to Himself through the death of His Son. He loves us. It was His love that redeemed us. It was His love that made Him give up...His precious blood, more precious than...any human commodity.

In Ephesians chapter 5, there's a wonderful statement in verse 2 that you're familiar with, no doubt. It says, "Walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given Himself for us as an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling fragrance." Christ loved us so much, He gave Himself for us. It's wonderful to know you're loved. It's wonderful to know that. He loves the church. He loves the church so much, He gave Himself for the church; and in the process of when we are ministering and giving our lives and all the best that we have, and we become anxious because the church isn't all that it oughta be, and we see people slipping through the cracks, and we wonder why it doesn't come out the way it oughta come out, and we say to ourselves as men of God or ministers or those who lead, "Oh, Lord, this is my life. This is my passion. I'm giving all that I have to this. I care about this. I live for this, and it isn't all that I want it to be. May our grief be assuaged by the fact that He loves it infinitely more than we do?"

And is not my own heart comforted in the fact that when I am in grief over those who do not do as they ought to do, and do not respond as they ought to respond, and I am grieved because of that. Think how much He who loves the church infinitely is grieved, and yet still loves. He loves His church, and having loved them, it says in John 13, "Having loved His own which were in the world, He loved them unto perfection." He doesn't stop loving His people because they fail. He doesn't stop loving His people because they fall. He doesn't stop loving His people because they are indifferent, because they don't take advantage of opportunity, resource, and privilege. He doesn't stop loving them; and we must remember, too, that the One who knows infinitely everything there is to know, loves even the people He knows so well; and we are comforted in the fact that He loves His church.

He predetermined to set His love upon them before the world began and He, in fact, will fulfill that until the world is reborn in eternity future. He loves us so much that He became sin for us who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him. He is at work in His church, loving His people, into the church and loving them while they're in the church; and His love was rising to God, it says in Ephesians 5:2, "As a sweet-smelling fragrance in the nostrils of the Holy One." So comforting. Christ loves His church.

That tells me I need to love His church in spite of things. It also tells me not to fear because, if I'm concerned about the church I love, He is infinitely more concerned about the church He loved. If I think that I have a right to be concerned because I've given so much of myself to the church, then how much of Himself has He given to the church that He should be so concerned, too, and far more than I.

In Revelation chapter 1 verse 5, there's just a beautiful statement there. It says, and, again, it's a doxology of praise. It's a glorious, majestic benediction; and what it says is this: "Unto Him that loves us, and washed us from our sins in His own blood, and has made us priests unto God."....Comprehensible. He loves His church. Present tense, by the way.

And what shall separate us from that love? Shall tribulation? Stress? Persecution? Famine? Nakedness? Peril? Sword? How about life? Death? Angels? Principalities? Things present? Things to come? Powers? Height? Depth? Any other creation? Never. "Having loved His own, which were in the world, He loves them unto perfection." So comforting to me, I...I just hold onto it. He loves the church far more than I love the church, and that says He'll give His attention to the object of His love.

Secondly, when you think about Him as the Savior of the church, you have to remember that He builds the church. As the one who saves, He's the one who builds. He brings us in. He adds to His church. He thickly frames it together that it might grow as a holy temple to Himself. I love it in Matthew 16, one of my favorite passages, "I will build My church." Oh, what a great thought. I mean we're not in the church building business...He is. It's not my job to build the church or anybody else's. It is not our job to contrive devices and means, schemes of human wisdom...to build the church. He'll build His church, and the gates of Hades won't prevail against it. That is a euphemism for death. That's a Hebrew euphemism for death. Death is the ultimate weapon that's in the hand of the adversary, according to Hebrews 2, who has the power of death, Satan.

And what He is saying is, "I will build My church, and the worst that could be done, killing them, won't prevail against it. You kill the church, and all you're doing is populating glory. That's all...I'll build My church." You know, I just wanna be a part of the church He's building. That's all. I just wanna be a part of the church He's building. That's why I'm so committed to the fact that we have to work by the...by the book. We don't wanna do anything that's gonna confuse us. We don't wanna be using all the human devices to build the church, because then we don't know whether we did it or He did it, right? And I don't wanna live with that. I just wanna be a part of what He's doing. What He's doing.

And I love what He says there, "I will build...not the church...I will build My church." What a great truth. He's the possessor. I'm often asked, "Who...who owns your church?" I like that question. Who owns our church? Lord Jesus Christ. He purchased it with His own precious blood. He owns it. He builds it. In fact, do you know something? He adds to the church daily such as should be saved. He's in the church building business.

In...in John 10, He says, "I know My sheep. My sheep know Me. They hear My voice. They follow Me. My sheep." I like that. We belong to Him. He's the builder/owner/purchaser/chief cornerstone/foundation/possessor. It's His church. It's being built with a certainty, bound up in the promise of God that cannot fail. Against all opposition, against all threats, against all carnality, against all human ineptitude, against all indifference, apathy, apostasy, liberalism, denominationalism, and

every other ism and spasm and all the rest of it, He's building His church, see. He's building His church. He's building His church...

First Corinthians 3:9 says, "You're God's building. You're God's building." Ephesians 2 says, "You've been built up a holy temple, a habitation of the Spirit."...Paul says to Timothy, "I'm telling you how you oughta behave in the church of the living God. It's His church. So He's the Savior, and He loves and builds His church. Secondly, in Hebrews 13:20, He's the Shepherd. It's a lovely, lovely thought. He is the great Shepherd of the sheep it says. As the Savior, He loves and builds. As the Shepherd, He has some very unique and special functions, too. But first of all, we wanna note that He's the great Shepherd in contrast to all other shepherds, who are just earthly. He's the great Shepherd.

Psalm 77:20 said of Moses, "Thou didst lead Thy people like a flock by the hand of Moses and Aaron." And they were shepherds, but not great shepherds. Three times in the New Testament it calls Jesus Christ the Shepherd. John 10, He's the good Shepherd; 1 Peter 5, He's the chief Shepherd; and Hebrews 13, He's the great Shepherd. Good Shepherd, chief Shepherd, great Shepherd. And, you know, in Scripture, I...I counted over half a dozen places at least where the Bible identifies ungodly peoples as nations with this title. They were "as sheep without...what?... a shepherd." So if we are believers, we are sheep what? With a Shepherd.

You know, we were meeting a week or so ago with our men, and we were talking and discussing and trying to develop a way to do a better job of shepherding; and I...I come away from times like that, because say, "You know, these people aren't getting into... involved, and these people aren't following through, and we're... we're not...we're losing some people over here; and...and we've got folks we haven't seen for a long time; and we wonder where they went, and we're...we're trying to track 'em down; and we...we have all of these sort of logistical issues to try to resolve," and you go away. You say, "Oh, Lord, how are we gonna keep track of these people? They don't come for a few weeks. Where are they? Or they're ill, and we don't know it. Or we hear about a tragedy; and...and we haven't talked to the people to find out if they're really moving along with the Lord, if their salvation is really genuine, and there's anxiety in the heart, and you worry about it." And I tell ya, some of those times, I go home and I...I...I find myself staring at the ceiling with my mind filled with the...the thought of, "How can we shepherd the sheep?"

But we are comforted in this, beloved: that the great Shepherd is shepherding His sheep. I think sometimes we think if a person gets saved and doesn't get into a follow-up program, they'll lose their salvation. We gotta help the Holy Spirit along. You can't just leave people up to the Lord. Gotta, you gotta get 'em in the program.

Now, we don't...we're not out of balance on that as long as we understand we wanna have all the tools; but the Lord is the Shepherd; and I'm not gonna worry about His sheep. I'm gonna do all I can to be involved, but, hey, they're His sheep. I wanna be faithful to what He gives me. But, listen, I can't

maintain my sanity if I feel I've got ultimate responsibility...I mean I'll give my whole heart to it, not because I think it depends on me. You wanna perspective, get this perspective. I don't serve the Lord Jesus Christ, teach His Word, or whatever. None of us do as elders or leaders of the church, pastors. None of us do that because we feel we're responsible for the church. I don't know about you, but I do it because I wanna be part of what Christ is doing. That's all.

You know something? He'll build His church with or without me. That's right. Listen, if the gates of hell can't prevail against you, you think John MacArthur could? He'll build His church without me. But I lose, and my wholehearted service to Christ, and all of our wholehearted service to Christ, is not to help God do what He otherwise couldn't do. It's to be a part of what He's doing...What a joy. So we shepherd with all our hearts in the best way we can; but when we run out of resources, and we don't know what to do or what to say, and we just don't know how to take care of people and meet their needs the way they oughta be met, we have to lean back and say, "But the great Shepherd is the Shepherd, isn't He?"

I was told yesterday of a lady who gave birth to a child in our church. She died, and the child is premature, on life support systems, and time period without oxygen to the brain, all this. Father's left without a wife and with a child like this; and you say, "Well, what do you say?" and you sort of stumble around, and then you fall back on the fact that the great Shepherd shepherds the sheep, doesn't He? That's...that's where human resources come to an end...but the Lord is the great Shepherd, chief Shepherd, good Shepherd.

As such, two things we look at that He does. First, He equips. He equips. Notice in verse 21 that, "The great Shepherd of the sheep, through means of the blood of the everlasting covenant, makes you perfect in every good work to do His will." The reason He perfected us in salvation, the reason He bought... brought us to saving perfection in Himself was in order to cause us to do His will. He's perfecting us to do His will. He's equipping us to do His will. Oh, it's so wonderful. He uses the Word to shape us and mold us into His will.

"Given Scripture...it says in 2 Timothy 3:16...for what purpose? That the man of God may be perfect." Equipped, thoroughly furnished to all good works; and so He's given us His Word; and then He's given us gifted men. Ephesians 4, and He gave some apostles and prophets and evangelists and teaching pastors or teaching shepherds for the perfecting, for the equipping of the saints. So He gives the Word, and He gives us the Word, and not only the Word, but some uniquely gifted men of God who can pour that Word into us. Then He gives us teachers, and then according to 1 Peter 5:10, it says, "After you've suffered a while, the Lord make you perfect." He gives us trials in which the Word can work, right?

In...in John's Gospel chapter 15, it says, "The Word is like a...it's like a knife, and it prunes us." Prunes us, so you take the Word brought to us individually and brought to us through gifted men, and

then the Lord comes in and brings suffering. After you've suffered a while, the Lord puts us through trials and temptations and painful suffering. Why? Because that's the context in which we are forced to apply the Word, right? That's the refining process.

You see, it's when I'm in a struggle, when I'm in struggling with sin and struggling with suffering, going through anxiety and pain and grief in my life, when I'm going through the troubled times, those are the times when I see boiling up within me the ugliness of my own sinfulness, and I learn to hate sin more. Those are the times when I may question God and doubt, and I learn to hate my own doubts and my own sinfulness more. Those are the times when I'm driven to my knees; and that's good. The times when I wanna draw night to God, and that's good. The times when I long for heaven and deliverance from this world, and that's good. And so suffering works a good thing. So the Lord brings the suffering. We bring the Word. Preachers aren't supposed to bring the suffering. Don't get confused on what your duty is. The Lord'll take care of that. You bring the Word.

So the Lord equips, builds up, strengthens. He gives us the power of the Holy Spirit. Says, "You shall be my witnesses after the Spirit's power comes upon you...in Acts 1:8...Judea, or Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the uttermost part of the earth." "And you'll go forth...He says in John 15...and bear much fruit." "And out of your belly...in John 7...will flow rivers of living water." And so He's equipping His church. Boy, it's so wonderful.

We have training class. We were talking about this. We have discipling. We gotta be involved in evangelism. And all the time we're working as hard as we can work, we remember in our mind that the Lord is equipping His church. He's doing it through the Word, through trials, through the power of the Spirit of God. Boy, that's so wonderful; and it isn't up to us. We're doing our best, because we wanna be a part of what He's doing, see? Can't think of a greater privilege...

In Ephesians 5:29, a verse that normally is used to speak of marriage, but really, perhaps more than anything, speaks of the church. It says, "No man ever yet hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it even as the Lord the church." The Lord nourishes and cherishes the church. Two beautiful words: nourish means to feed, and cherish means to warm with body heat. It'd be like a...it would be like a nursing mother for us... the...the...the term cherish is used of a nursing mother in 1 Thessalonians 2:7; and it's as if the Lord takes in His beloved and nurses and nurtures and warms. It means to warm with body heat, to melt or to soften. And here's intimacy. The Lord comes and shepherds us, feeding us, and warming us, and melting us down to reshape us. Beautiful thought. Beautiful thought.

He's at work. He's at work. That's a comforting thing. When I've run out of resources, when I've run out of ideas, when I'm frustrated in my mind, I say, "Lord, how do we get people more committed? How do we get 'em moving along, more equipped, more faithful, growing, maturing? Lord, we...we need new way... ways to do it, new levels of commitment," and I'm comforted in the fact that He's

doing it. He's moving His church along. He's equipping His church. He's nourishing, cherishing His church... Great comfort.

Secondly, as Shepherd, He intercedes for His church. Just like a shepherd would go out and fight off the wolf, the Lord Jesus Christ fights off the adversary who comes constantly before the throne of God to accuse the brethren. He comes before the throne of God to...to accuse us, as he did to accuse Job; and Jesus comes to our rescue and defends us. He is our defender. He is our intercessor. He is our advocate. He is our empathizer. He is our sympathizer. He is our high Priest. Oh, what a great thought.

And you see Him in John 17 as He prays to the Father, and He says, "Oh, Father, I pray not for those that are in the world, but for those that you've given unto Me that they may be one. Oh, Father, I pray that they may be one with Me as I am one with You." And He prays for His own in that marvelous passage, and you see continuing through the New Testament His high priestly work. First John 2 says, "If any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous." In other words, when you sin and the accusation of your sin is brought before the throne of God, Jesus stands as your advocate and says, "Father, that sin is paid for. That sin is paid for. My blood paid for that sin." And that's why no sin can be charged against God's elect. Is God gonna charge it against your...you as His elect when He has elected you? Is he gonna charge it against you when He has justified you already? Shall God that justified you once charge some sin against your account? Is there information He didn't have or a higher court than God? Shall Christ condemn you, who bore your sin in His own body on the tree? Shall He who perfectly expiated all your sin have some sin that He will hold against you? Not on your life, and so there is that ever, ever interceding Christ.

So He intercedes for His church. He talks to the Father about our needs, too, because we have many needs. He is not a high priest who cannot be touched with the feelings of our infirmities, but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. He knows exactly what we go through; and so He's able to succor us or help us, it says in Hebrews 2:18. "He is a perfect high Priest...Hebrews 7:25 says...who ever lives to make intercession for us." He was hungry. He was thirsty. He was overcome with fatigue. He slept. He was taught. He grew. He was loved. He was hated. He loved. He hated. He was astonished. He marveled. He was glad. He was sad. He was angry. He was indignant. He was sarcastic. He was grieved. He was troubled. He was overcome by future events. He exercised faith. He read Scripture. He prayed all night. He poured out His heart over the pain of men, and He wept when His own heart ached. Oh, He's been there. Sympathetic. Empathetic, and defending us. Great thought. He is our faithful high Priest. Always interceding.

And so we see Him then as Shepherd, on the one hand feeding in a nurturing kind of cherishing kind of relationship to equip His church to do His will. In another sense, He intercedes on our behalf making sure there's never anything against us. "His blood keeps on cleansing us from all sin...1 John 1:9." Savior of His church, Shepherd of His church.

Thirdly, He's Sovereign of His church. He's Sovereign of His church. Look again at the text and notice the word Lord. Ninety-two times kourias is used in the New Testament; and we may discuss various shades of meanings of the word, but one thing is very clear. When it is used in the New Testament in reference to the Son of God, it means Sovereign One. It's means controlling One. It means One who is in complete authority. He is the Lord. He is the Lord. He is the Sovereign in His own church.

It tells us in Ephesians chapter 1 that, "God has put all things under His feet and gave Him to be the head over all things to the church which is His body, the fullness of Him that filleth all in all." He is in charge. Colossians chapter 1 says essentially the same thing in verse 19. It says, "It pleased the Father that in Him should all divine fullness dwell. Therefore...verse 18 says...He's the head of the church. He's the beginning. He's the protatikas, the preeminent One that in all things He might have the preeminence."

So the concept of Lord has to do with the fact that Jesus Christ is the Sovereign One. Now that manifests itself in the church again in two ways that I wanna emphasize for you. First, He rules His church. As the Lord of His church, He rules His church. Lemme tell you something, folks. If anyone asks you who is in charge of Grace Church, you tell 'em Jesus Christ; and that is not being said facetiously. Jesus Christ is the head of His church. Ephesians 5:23 says He's the head. The word used there is keffalay, basically has to do with sorta the idea of being first or being prominent or being supreme or being the determiner. The one who's calling the shots. The sovereign is the idea again. He is the head of His church. That's repeated several places in the New Testament. And, as the head, He has the authority in His church. He rules in His church. You see Him in Revelation 1, and He's moving among the candlesticks, each representative of His church, and He's trimming the lamps, and He's coming with bronzed feet and burning, penetrating eyes as He searches out the sin that needs to be crushed out of His church. He is the Lord of His church. That is why in Matthew 18, where you have the discipline process and sin being dealt with there, it says, "When two or three are gathered together, there am I in the midst of them," and it isn't two or three in a prayer meeting. It's two or three witnesses who confirm the sin of someone in a discipline. The whole passage is about discipline, and He says, "Don't hesitate to do it, because when you call together the right witnesses and affirm the sin, you don't need to hold back, because I'm there in the midst doing it with you." So you're only binding on earth what's already been bound in heaven; and you're only loosing on earth what's already been loosed in heaven. So you act in behalf of Christ. Great truth.

He rules His church, and He rules through a plurality of godly men as He always had, and that's why have 50-some elders at Grace Church, and we have one goal. Our single goal is do what Christ wants us to do. Now, we know a lot of what He wants us to do, because it's written here; and where the Book doesn't speak, and where we don't have information in...in the Scripture itself to speak to a certain issue, it's up to us to discern the mind of God, prayerfully, thoughtfully, patiently, to wait till God unfolds to us the thing He wants to do. That's why we've always been committed to the fact that

everything we decide, 50-plus men, is unanimous or we don't do it. It's unanimous, because God only has one will. It's up to all of us who are His...we're under shepherds of Jesus Christ, to know what that will is. It's up to us to know what Christ wants to do in His church, and we will seek His mind till all of us come to an understanding of what that mind is.

Christ rules His church. I don't want the responsibility nor does any human who thinks clearly...It's bad enough to have to answer for your own life without having to answer for a whole host of others. So we seek the mind of God through prayer till the Spirit of God reveals His will; but he is the ruler of His church; and the only thing we wanna do is discern His will. That's all we wanna do. We wanna discern His will. That's why we go by this Book, see. Now, that's...it simplifies it.

Secondly, as we think about the Lord Jesus Christ in His church, He not only rules His church, but He teaches His church. He teaches His church. That's part of His ruling. He has authority to exercise in all matters, and He has authority to reveal in all truth. He...He's our teacher. His will is revealed through His Word. His will is revealed through human instruments, but He's the teacher. In fact, He said to the disciples in the Gospel of John several times that this would be the case. In John 14, I believe it's verse 20, He says, "You will know that I am in My Father, and you are in Me, and I am in you. You're gonna know these things. You're gonna know a lotta things."

How you gonna know that? Verse 26, "The Comforter, who is the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He'll teach you all things. He'll bring all things to your remembrance, whatever I have said unto you." Verse 26 of chapter 15, "When the Comforter is come, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of Truth, who proceeds from the Father, He shall testify of Me. He'll tell you about Me. He'll tell you what you need to know." Chapter 16 verse 12, "I have many things to say to you. You can't bear them now. Nevertheless, when He, the Spirit of Truth, is come, He'll guide you into all truth; He'll not speak of Himself, but whatever He shall hear, that shall He speak; and He will show you things to come; and He'll glorify Me, for He shall receive from Me and give unto you."

So, see, the Lord keeps the controlling place. He rules, and He feeds and teaches His church through the Word and the Spirit. Through the Word and the Spirit. Through the Word and the Spirit. And so when we go to the Word of God, we see what's clear in the Word, and we draw on the Spirit. That's 1 John 2:20 and 27. It says, "We have an anointing from God. We don't need human teachers. We have an anointing from God." That is earthly, worldly teachers outside the Kingdom who don't know the Word of God. We don't need that kind of wisdom, because we have an anointing from God; and that anointing is none other than the Holy Spirit. So we have the Word of God and the author, the Spirit of God, pouring truth though the gifted men of God; and, thus, Christ is leading His church.

I'm not here to give you my opinion on anything. If I ever do that, you run me outta town. I'm not here to give you my opinion on anything. I'm not here to talk on social issues that aren't relative to the Word of God. I'm here to open to you the Word of God that you may know the mind of God and the

heart of the Savior, that He may teach His church. And I've said this before. I say it again. I'm only a...I'm only a waiter. I didn't cook the meal. I'm only supposed to deliver it without messing it up, and get it to you hot...

Lastly, He's not only the Savior who loves and builds His church and the Shepherd who equips and intercedes for His church and the Sovereign who rules and teaches His church, but He's the Sanctifier who purifies and glorifies His church. He's the Sanctifier who purifies and glorifies His church. Look at verse 21. The ultimate goal is to work in you. Oh, that's so good. You see, it's so good to know that He's at work in us, isn't it? He's the Sanctifier. He's the one setting us apart from sin. He's the one purifying us; and, also, He's the one leading us to give Him glory for ever and ever. He's the Sanctifier, Purifier, Glorifier.

Ah, you know, we...we get concerned. You do, too. You see somebody that's a Christian, but there's sin in their life, and you just...you worry about it. You wanna see them out of that. You confront 'em, and maybe the discipline process goes on, and we talked today about a guy who just keeps getting into sin, and then he says he's gonna stop, and then he keeps in it again, and then he comes out, and again he's in and out and...and here we are again, needing to...to go back through the discipline again. And...and you can...you become so grieving in your heart over these kinds of things; and the only comfort you have that if He belongs to Jesus Christ, He is the Purifier of His church. It may be that He'll purify His church with removal. It may be He'll purify His church with a death of a believer who's unfaithful, as in 1 Corinthians 11 and 1 John 5. It may be that He'll purify His church by strengthening that Christian and drawing him into holiness. That's...that's for Him to do. But His goal is to do that. That's what it says in Ephesians 5.

Listen to what it says, "Husbands, love your wives as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for it." Why'd He do that? Why did He do that? "That He might sanctify, set it apart from the world and cleanse it with the washing of water by the Word." He wants His church pure and clean in order that ultimately He might present it to Himself a glorious church. That's the glory of the church. He purifies it to bring it to glory that He might have a church which is without spot, without wrinkle, or any such thing, but holy and without blemish.

So He's the Purifier and the Glorifier. He purifies. Ultimately, He glorifies. And glorifying is simply ultimate purification, isn't it?..."Someday we will be to the praise and the glory of God; and through Jesus Christ, the God of Peace will receive glory for ever and ever. Amen." From us. Christ purifies, and He's at work purifying, purging. Well, that's so comforting to know that. And bringing us to glory, bringing us to glory. When we get up there, folks, we'll all be perfect, without spot, without blemish.

Well, I hope it's as hopeful to you to hear these things as it is...as it is to me - that we're not alone in this deal. Lemme say it again what I said earlier. It's a key thought. Listen. We're not doing what Christ can't do, folks. We're not building the church because He needs us to build it. If Grace Church

blew up today...I don't expect it...if it did, the church of Jesus Christ would move ahead. If I drop dead and every one of our leaders did, the church would move ahead. He does not need us to build His church. You say, "Well, why are we working so hard?" I'll tell you why. Because there's no more marvelous, thrilling, glorious, joy-producing, soul-satisfying function than to be a part of what Jesus Christ is building for His eternal glory.

Reporter came up to the construction site of St. Paul's Cathedral in London many years ago. He was doing a story on the building of that great cathedral. He said to a guy there with a bunch of stones in his hand, he said, "What are you doing?" He said, "Can't you see what I'm doing? I'm sticking stones in here to build this thing. Just more stones all the time. Just carrying these stones." Went to a second guy, and he said, "What are you doing?" He said, "I'm earning a living. I got a family, a buncha children. I'm...I'm earning a living." Went to a third fella and said, "What are you doing?" "Oh," he said, "I'm...I'm helping Sir Christopher Wren build St. Paul's Cathedral." That's a different perspective, isn't it?

What are you doing? "Well, I'm just sticking these stones in here. I gotta do this, you know." "Well, I'm earning a living. I mean, after all, I'm a Christian. I gotta do something...spiritual." "Well, no, I'm...I'm a part of Christ building His eternal Kingdom." Boy, what a glorious thought...

Father, we thank You that You've given us Your Word and left us with no doubt and no confusion as to what it means to us and what it requires of us. And, yet, You've also given us Yourself and it's really Your work. Do it, Lord, do it for Your glory, and let us be a part, not because You need us, but because we wanna be a part of something that's eternal. We wanna show our love. We wanna work with you. We wanna know the joy and thrill of blessing that comes to the obedient, faithful, diligent...

In the silence of this moment, you might offer to the Lord some thanks for the Savior who loved you and built you into His church. For the Shepherd who equips you, intercedes for you. For the Sovereign who rules and teaches you. For the Sanctifier who purifies and ultimately will glorify you...Your heart oughta be filled with thanksgiving...Some of you don't even know the Lord, but maybe there's a moving in your heart of the Spirit of God and a prompting that says, "I want Christ...to take my sin away. I want Him to be Lord in my life. I wanna turn the destiny of my life over to Him." Seek Him in that regard. Open your heart to Him...in response to the prompting of the Spirit of God. Others of you, perhaps, sense the need to belong to a fellowship, to become a part of this church...or any church where Christ is lifted up and exalted, and you can serve His holy name...Let your heart be easily plied by the Spirit of God.

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