

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

Bible Questions and Answers, Part 60

Scripture: Selected Scriptures

Code: 70-32

AUSTIN: Hi, Pastor. (laughter)

JOHN: Why do you have a silly grin on your face?

AUSTIN: This is my normal expression. I'm glad to be here tonight. It seems like everyone else is. They gave you a warm round of applause. And we love, at this church, to ask you questions. I got a little taste of what it's like to be John MacArthur today when you announced that I would be asking questions tonight. All day long people have been approaching me with questions—witch of Endor, who wrote Hebrews?, unpardonable sin—all day long. So I got a little taste of what it might be like.

JOHN: And you know the answer to all of those?

AUSTIN: That was the difference was (laughter) I referred them all to the *MacArthur Study Bible*.

JOHN: We could get you one of those at a discount.

AUSTIN: I've been saving up. I wanted to ask you, not a thousand random Bible questions—though those are fun, too—but really focus tonight on talking to you about the church, in particular about this church. You've been serving here for many, many years and your service here has been deliberate and purposeful. I think this church is probably different today than it was when you first came. Why don't you talk to us a little bit about what it was like being a young pastor coming to Grace Community Church—what that experience was like in those early years, and what you learned in those days.

JOHN: Yeah, sure; I had a lot of real vivid memories about those early years. I came out of seminary and I worked with my dad for a while. And then I went back to the seminary and I worked at Talbot Seminary from which I graduated. I went there because I wanted to study under Dr. Charles Feinberg, who had a massive impact on my life. Anyway, I came out of those experiences of working with my dad and at the seminary and I wanted to pastor a church but nobody really asked me. I had interviewed with a couple of churches. One was in Long Beach, and then there was some interest in another church, but they all felt that I was too young. I was still in my twenties and they may well have been right.

And then I did a high school camp. I had done a number of high school camps, a lot of speaking to young people then, just about every week. And it was for a group of high schoolers from this church.

We had a great time and when it was over some of the kids came back because there was not a pastor here at the time. They had two pastors in a row who died of heart attacks and I think they were ready for a young pastor at that point. There were two sweet widows who were in the care of the church at that point, and so I think they were ready to look at someone young. And the kids came back from camp and we had such a great time; they said, "Could we have John MacArthur come and preach?" So I came with Patricia and I preached here on a Sunday night. I think it was in November of 1968 and I actually preached about an hour and twenty-five minutes. I was in the chapel and I was so caught up, I had been studying all summer Romans 6, 7 and 8, and I just tried to unpack the whole thing.

Patricia said to me, "Well there goes that church." You know, and she had a reason to say it; I was ridiculous. But the next week they asked me to come back and preach, and there was a huge clock on the back wall that somebody had bought and put up there. But they had...they loved the teaching of the Word of God. They asked if I would consider to becoming the pastor and I said that's in my heart, that's what I want to do, I want to teach the Word of God. I want to preach the Word of God. And that was...it was February 9, 1969, that I had my first Sunday here.

AUSTIN: That's amazing. For those of us who weren't here then or weren't born then (laughter), tell us a little bit about what the church was like. What was the congregation like? How was the church run? Was it similar to the church today? You know, what was the area like? It wasn't quite like this, was it?

JOHN: Oh, no, no. It was different. This was largely a Jewish community; that's why a synagogue was here. This was a postwar community. The Panorama City Mall was the first mall in Southern California. It was very different than it is now. The houses that were built around here were postwar kind of housing. They were small, they were inexpensive. There were a lot of Jewish people. I didn't even think about that, really. But even then, even in those years when Grace Community Church had the chapel and it seated 300 people, and so there were about maybe 400 people who were here then. I never really thought about the location, the demographics. I mean, you know, I had one option and one invitation, and the more I met the people that, you know, I interacted with, the more I began to appreciate them and hear their heart and the response came pretty fast. And it was wonderful.

The church had had two pastors, the founding pastor, Don Householder was a Methodist, so the theology was very different. There was really no doctrinal statement. The form of church policy...the second pastor was only here a few years and he was a Baptist gentleman named Dr. Elvee. So there wasn't a lot of theology in place, and if there was any it tended to be Methodist, which would be Arminian kind of theology and that was not where I was, for sure. There was a lot of interesting young people. This church had strong leadership from Paul Sailhamer in the youth area, was very involved with Youth for Christ. And so there were lots of young people here, and that was very attractive and I had gotten to know them because I had spoken at camp. There was an interest on the part of the

elders in the church in the teaching of the Word of God, and then there was indifference on the part of many others about that.

So it was very different than it is now. The way the church operated was it had a Board of Elders, most of them were Christians; some of them were not. And it had all kinds of other Boards. There was a board for everything. The church wasn't that big but they put everybody on a board and boards made decisions about ministries and boards were made up of people who weren't in those ministries. So you had people external to the ministry making decisions with regard to the ministry, which imposed upon the people in it a kind of a burden because they didn't know what the nature of the ministry was. So there were just lots of boards, lots of people in leadership and not really clear doctrinal statement. Not really a clear biblical ecclesiology.

It was an independent church so it didn't have any connection to any other association or anything. So that was kind of what it was. I knew it had...while it had had faithful preaching of the gospel and some preaching from Scripture, it wasn't doctrinally definitive at all and I knew in those early years that there...I told them this: I'm going to teach the Bible, I'm going to teach the Bible. That's what I'm going to do. So I need 35 hours a week to study to teach the Bible, because that's where we're going to go. I wasn't going to come in and impose a theological system on them, or an ecclesiological system on them, or an ecclesiological system, in other words the structure of the church, I just want to teach the Bible, and we'd learn as we'd go. And we'd see what the Word of God says, and then we'd implement it. And that's what we did.

And in those early years there was some conflict with people because I wouldn't do certain things that weren't biblical to do. There was conflict over the direction the doctrine was going. There were people on the elder board and other boards that resigned, some of them not Christians. And so there was a lot of shaking going on here. But there was always this hunger for the Word of God, and there was a tremendous amount of enthusiasm and joy over the teaching of Scripture. And I actually started in the gospel of John because I wanted them to have to see Christ and deal with Christ because, I mean, that's what being a Christian is. It's loving Christ, being conformed to Christ.

So survived some of the early battles. I'm not sure why except in the providence of God He allowed that to happen. And it began to take form and shape. One of the vital things was, every Saturday morning for seven or eight years, I met with a group of men. They became the pastoral staff. They became the elders. They became the leaders of the church and I just poured biblical theology into their souls every Saturday morning. We just talked about theology, sound doctrine, the Scriptures, and there were certain men that I invited. And then I threw it open to any men, not knowing who God might want to bring. We had 30, 40, 50 men for that period of seven or eight years, and that's what shaped the church because once those men...and I think it took seven, eight years for them to grasp the full understanding of what I was trying to convey to them because you sort of had to delete a lot. But anyway, when we finally got there, this church had been shaped around those years of teaching

the Word of God, and the key men in leadership had owned that and so that leadership was effective.

AUSTIN: So, your priorities when you came were preaching the Word of God and training men.

JOHN: Preach the Word of God, train men, because you have to share the load. I mean, it's a Jethro principle, right? You can't do it all. Moses' father-in-law said to me, you can't do it all. You've got to find somebody to put over hundreds, and somebody over fifties, and got to divide this thing down.

Well, if you're going to disperse leadership, you have to make sure that it's accurately representative of the Word of God. And so that means you have to train the leaders, you have to teach the leaders. And at the time that I was teaching them, I was largely in the process of discovering myself. I wasn't like guys in the seminary now who have an already codified, mature, fully developed ecclesiology, doctrine of the church, handed to them. I was in the developmental stage. I had come out of a Baptist background. My dad didn't really even think about a biblical ecclesiology; he just thought about defending the Scripture, evangelizing the lost, and teaching the Bible. And so I grew up with a very confused kind of design for the order of the church. In my college I didn't learn anything about that. When I went to seminary I...you know, I really didn't...I wasn't able to crystalize that. I found an old obscure book written by a Plymouth Brethren many, many, many years ago and I began to dig into this book all by myself. It was a book called *The New Testament Order for the Church*. And it was just a weird book. In fact, some of it was printed upside down, inverted. The pages didn't go from one to 300; they went from one to twelve, and then from 79 to 84, and somebody messed up putting it together. But I worked my way through that book because it was a biblical ecclesiology and it became kind of my pattern to understand because it was purely based on what the New Testament taught.

And so I cancelled out all the past and all of the different forms of church polity and structure that I had seen, sort of had the effect of cancelling each other out. I had been in an environment where there was a kind of Presbyterianism with a hierarchy and sort of regional eldership who called the shots and put the pastors in. And then I'd come out of a situation with my dad where there was more of a loose Baptist. And then he was an independent for a while. I had seen it all and it all sort of cancelled it out and drove me back to what Scripture is, and we've tried to conform from those early years the understanding of how the church functions to what the New Testament says.

AUSTIN: When you made these discoveries in the Word and were putting them into practice, these discoveries about ecclesiology, elder...

JOHN: By the way, ecclesiology is the doctrine of the church. *Ekklesia* is the word we use for church. So it's the study of the church.

AUSTIN: And thinking about the aspects of ecclesiology that's church leadership, you're making these discoveries about elders and you already had elders but now you're seeing what elders are for

and what they're supposed to be doing. You're discovering what deacons are biblically, as you implemented those things over those initial years, what impact did that have on the congregation?

JOHN: Well, I think it's had an immense impact eventually. It had a very difficult impact initially. You know, one of the things—and I try to tell this to young guys who come out of the seminary with everything, you know, fully understood: people in positions of leadership in a church that you go to are there because somebody put them there. They're there because somebody believes they ought to be there. And if you're the new guy on the block and you start yanking people out of leadership positions and denouncing them for what they have been appointed to do, all you're going to do is start a war you can't win because you haven't earned the right to do that. That...that message has to come to them from the Word of God. That has to come to them by the Spirit through the Word.

So, you know, I didn't come in and start throwing people out who didn't belong in leadership, I just came in and started to teach the Word of God and I remember people coming to me saying, "I shouldn't be an elder. I don't belong in this. I shouldn't be a deacon. I shouldn't be teaching a Sunday school class. I don't fit this." And that was starting to happen at the level of these men and trickling down, and then I started also teaching in the book of Ephesians very early on and we talked about the church and what it was and how it was led by evangelists and teaching pastors, and what they did, and they perfected the saints for the work of the ministry, and conformity to Christ, Ephesians 4. And people just started kind of walking away and saying, "You know, I don't want to be a part of this. I don't belong here." And there were unconverted elders who just started dropping off, and I was patient. You know, I'm not a patient person by nature. But when the Holy Spirit gets a hold of me, I...He works patience into me, I think. But I knew I had to be patient or I could just...I would just be creating issues every time I turned around.

So, over a period of time people began to understand what spiritual leadership was and what eldership was, and what a deacon was, and deaconess, and how you serve in the church and...you know, one of the big deals was church discipline. I didn't know any church anywhere on the planet that did that. I didn't know any, I never heard of one, never saw one where people got up and said, "Somebody has sinned and they won't repent and we're going to tell the whole congregation." I had never heard of that. And I said, "We need to do that because that's in the Bible, that's there, so if nobody's doing it, we're going to do it." And I was told, "You'll empty the church. You know, people will run out the back door so fast."

Well, the opposite happened. People who loved the Lord want that kind of care of their souls and accountability and support and encouragement. Discipline is not to put people out of the church, it's to purify the people who are in the church. So yeah, it just was a question of time and patience and, you know, it wasn't all battle at the early years, it wasn't all difficulty because the church began to grow really fast, really soon. Expository preaching wasn't what was going on. There was a hunger for the Word of God. We just sort of caught the wave of the end of the Jesus Movement, or really the middle

of the Jesus Movement when there was a new interest in Bible study. Up to that point everybody had a King James and then all of a sudden you had new translations of the Bible, you had Youth Movement, Campus Crusade, Calvary Chapels, Independent Bible Study, personal Bible study, people were buying Bible covers and carrying their Bible covers around with doves on them and fish signs. And, you know, there was a whole kind of revival and we caught the wave of that interest in Bible studies. So whatever was going on internally as we were trying to get people in the leadership to understand what spiritual leadership in the church was. At the same time we were drawing people in. So, it was hard to be negative even if you were seeing the reality that you shouldn't be in leadership. People were still grateful that the Lord was pouring people into this church and it doubled in the first couple of years. We didn't do anything to make that happen. We didn't advertise; we didn't do anything. It was all word of mouth, people were bringing their friends.

So countering the challenges was this obvious blessing of God on His Word, and it was blessing the people who were hearing it and they were bringing their friends.

AUSTIN: There had to be a lot of challenges with that kind of exponential growth. What were some of the difficulties that you and the leadership encountered with having the place full, besides chairs?

JOHN: Well, there were a lot of issues. In the chapel there were people sitting all around the front, sitting on the steps, I'd be speaking and there would be people everywhere in there.

AUSTIN: On the ground.

JOHN: On the floor, sitting on the floor like they do in other parts of the world when we go to those places. And they would be so surrounding me, and it was so intimate that sometimes they'd talk back. (Laughter) That's right. I have a vivid memory of one evening when a guy said, "I don't buy that." (Laughter) And I just interacted with him. "I'm sorry you feel that way." He felt so comfortable sitting on the floor right in front of me that he wanted to argue with me. And that was fine. That was fine. There was a certain honesty and integrity and....

AUSTIN: I'm just trying to think of what that would be like now. (Laughter) It would be two or two dozen people that would tackle him, and then minister to him.

JOHN: Yeah. Unfortunately. But there was a warmth; there was...yeah, we had issues. There's a lot of favorite stories, but one of them was we had communion like this and so many people came, they knew they didn't have enough bread to give in the communion, so they were planning a spaghetti supper after the service, so they just grabbed all the garlic bread and gave it to the last four rows. You know, so. We had another, you know. I thought, well, let's try something different so we don't run out of bread, so let's get big chunks of bread and you could just break off a piece and pass, pass, pass, pass. So I told the guys that they're going to serve the bread, you know, hold the tray and let them

take a chunk, take one of these little loaves and pass the loaf down, but hold the tray.

Well, they're creatures of habit, so they passed the tray. So at the end of two rows all the bread is gone and people are looking at an entire loaf waiting for me to say, "This do in remembrance of Me," and then wash it down with one ounce of grape juice. So I said, "Could you go back and collect that?" So yeah, we had some issues.

I remember when we made the flip and went into the gym, which happened very soon afterwards because we needed to build, and we built the gym, we met there. Paul Dekorte was one of my dear friends whose with the Lord, been with the Lord a long time, he was just coming to his church, Paul and Julie DeKorte and their family and they really loved the church and he became very dear friends to Patricia and myself. And he came up to me one Sunday and he said, "You know, this is an exciting place, but who's the drunk usher?" I said, "What?" He said, "There's a guy over there, he's absolutely bombed every Sunday. He's your best greeter. He's one happy guy."

So, he was right. So we had to sort of make a rule that you need to be sober to be an usher.

AUSTIN: And that's still a rule today.

JOHN: That is still a rule today. We had people in the patio grabbing people and putting them in a children's room with kids to help because more kids came than we had teachers for. So we had to really ramp up the training and preparations so that we didn't face those kinds of problems. Those are always good problems to have, but they're problems that need to be solved.

AUSTIN: And you're witnessing lots and lots of conversions at this time, and people are coming to Christ.

JOHN: And there were no baptistry here. This is a Methodist church. You don't need a baptistry, you just need a cup of water and go like this, you know.

AUSTIN: So why don't you talk a little bit about the history of....

JOHN: So we had to go to a Baptist church in North Hollywood and baptize them 'cause we didn't have a baptistry. Yeah. We borrowed their water.

AUSTIN: So that required teaching about what baptism is.

JOHN: Yeah, I mean I came to a church that didn't have a baptistry.

AUSTIN: Right.

JOHN: And I think baptism is a required, commanded New Testament ordinance for believers. So, you know, they had a policy here of baptism is negotiable. You can be sprayed, sprinkled, dripped on, immersed, or nothing, if you want. That was just a reflection of the lack of a doctrinal statement. So we started that and then when we built the gym, if you go in the gym now and you look at the front, on the right was a baptistry. That was a baptistry there, behind that kind of Taco Bell arch.

AUSTIN: I'm in there regularly. I'm going to start using that. Not the baptistry, the arch. So teaching the people about baptism and undoubtedly you're teaching what the Bible says about church leadership, you're probably attracting some Presbyterian kind of people into the church and those folks.

JOHN: Well, first of all, you had all these leaders who had never been baptized, or who had been sprinkled when they were babies. And so finding a path of patience and yet firmness. Look, we need to do this because this is right, and we've got to get past giving people options here. It took some time and as I said, we didn't have a baptistry so that we could demonstrate this and when we finally did get one, that's when I said, "You know, I have to make much of baptism, I have to make much of baptism because they've had none of it." So that's when I said we're going to do it differently. We're not just going to have five people and run them through and put them in the water and pull them out. We're going to slow the whole process down so that it becomes a living, dynamic and wonderful experience. And that's when I said we're going to have everybody who's baptized come into the water, give a personal testimony. We're still doing that now, 40 years later. That was really born out of the fact that we wanted...we wanted it to be important and prominent and everything that would honor the Lord.

AUSTIN: So in that transition, or in that growth to become a church that practices believer's baptism, tell us about those convictions about baptism. I'm thinking of a lot of folks I've talked to who are maybe afraid of that opportunity, you know.

JOHN: Well, I'd be afraid, I'd be afraid, I'd be afraid not to be baptized.

AUSTIN: Why is that?

JOHN: Because you're not being obedient. I don't want to be in a position to be disobedient to the Lord. That's not tough, that's not brain surgery, you know; just come and share a simple testimony, be willing to proclaim Christ publicly and openly. That for the privilege of confessing Him before men who will then confess you before men, and also for the proclamation side of it, to those who come and hear your testimony. I'm always afraid of disobedience any way as a believer, and particularly that which is obvious. So I...this isn't overly difficult. If the idea of saying something paralyzes people, we'd be happy to say it for them.

AUSTIN: Right.

JOHN: We'd be happy to say it for them. Better to say nothing and have something read or something put in print or whatever to give your testimony, if that's an issue. But I think to take that step for Christ and be willing to speak in the church is a pretty good indicator that you'd also be willing to speak of Christ in the world. If you're too shy to speak of Christ in the church, then are you going to be so shy that you can't speak of Christ in the world either? Because you have a mandate to do that. This is the most comfortable place to break that barrier.

AUSTIN: And we see the evangelistic implications of baptism. A person comes to Christ, they're baptized. Talk a little bit about the meaning and significance of baptism.

JOHN: Look, the Lord only gave us two ordinances to follow. One looks at His cross and that's the Lord's Table, the blood and the bread. The other looks at His resurrection. This is...this is just all that's left of all the symbolism under the Old Covenant. This is all there is, is to remember His death in this dramatic demonstration and to remember His resurrection in an equally dramatic resurrection. Eating the bread and the cup is like John 6, it's a symbol of eating Christ, of taking in His death for us and being baptized, put into the water and lifted out of the water is to symbolize being buried with Him in death and rising with Him in newness of life. And these are simple, symbolic things, but they're non-negotiable ordinances that He's given to us. And I don't think they're hard to figure out in the Scripture. You can't find infant baptism anywhere in the Bible, at all. And the word "baptize" means to dip into water, so it's not spraying or sprinkling that it's talking about. So you have a simple, beautiful ordinance in which you confess the death of Christ and then another one in which you confess the resurrection of Christ and your union with Him in His death and in His resurrection.

AUSTIN: And so the symbolism of baptism is powerful. It's also an initiatory right. So we ask that people are baptized as believers before they join the church.

JOHN: Sure, if...yeah, if you look around you don't see...you see nothing but a cross in front. You don't see a lot of holy hardware hanging all over the place. We don't have any mandate to do that. We have a mandate to focus on the cross of Christ at His table, and the resurrection in the waters of baptism. And because that's all we have, that communicates that that's all the Lord gave us to have.

You know, you go into some kind of a Catholic cathedral and you're just literally blasted with all this stuff, all this symbolism all over the map. And it would be very hard to sort out anything that was really significant. But here it's easy. This and the baptism—we're sitting on the baptistry as we speak, that's it. And the cross is there to mark out this place as a place where the Lord Jesus Christ is exalted.

AUSTIN: Love it! Baptism marking the entrance to the church and having a formal church role, or a formal church membership—is that something that was always in place? Did that develop over time? What does it mean to be a church member? Does it really matter? Baptisms are required; is church membership important, or not important?

JOHN: Really good question, Austin. (Laughter) No. They've all been good questions. I'm sorry.

AUSTIN: Well, I asked that one instead of whose your favorite associate pastor. So I'm...I think I chose right. Sorry. Keep going.

JOHN: Okay, look. We started a series of articles on the Grace to You website over the last week or so on church membership. I haven't seen anything that's been posted on the Grace to You website that's generated the response that this discussion has. And we've done some very, very dynamic things on there, gotten some response. We've done some very controversial things, as you would imagine. We've confronted all kinds of issues there. I haven't seen anything that generated as much response as this discussion about church membership. It has brought all kinds of people out of the woodwork, some who are...they fall into these categories: "You know, I think you're right, I think this is absolutely right, but I can't find a church that I'm willing to join," to "Where do you get this stuff? This is ridiculous. You're imposing this on the Bible. This has nothing to do with it." You have entire movements that disdain church membership.

One, for example, is Calvary Chapel. There isn't a Calvary Chapel in existence in the world that has church membership. They deny that that has anything to do with the New Testament, or the believer's responsibility. You have other movements like that that don't have anything to do with church membership. So there's a lot of...a lot of viewpoints floating around. But let me make it simple. I don't think the New Testament knows anything about a Christian that doesn't belong to a local assembly. And by *belong*, what do I mean? I simply mean who is fully identified with a local body of believers.

For example, and it all begins in places like this. It's so assumed in the New Testament, it doesn't need to be commanded. For example, when the first group of believers gathers in the city of Jerusalem, it says there's a hundred and twenty of them. Well, who knew that? Who had the list?

AUSTIN: Somebody's counting.

JOHN: Somebody's counting and on the Day of Pentecost there were three thousand who were men. So they...not only three thousand men, and further into the fourth chapter there were five thousand men, so they knew who the men were and in an Old Testament way they marked the men because they were the leader of the family and the women and children would follow. So they not only knew who they were, they knew what sex they were. They knew they were men. They had lists. Widows, if you keep going in the book of Acts, were to be ministered to by the church if they were on the list. So

they knew who the families were. They knew who the men were. They knew who the widows were who were on the list. And the widows who were on the list, according to 1 Timothy 5, were to be cared for by the church. When a believer went from one community to the next, they would carry a letter of recommendation from a group of believers where they had been to the group of believers where they were going. So they sent from church to church, and the story of their testimony came by letter as they carried a letter from one congregation to another congregation—that congregation could embrace them. That kind of...that kind of assumption is made throughout the entire New Testament. The epistles are written to the church at Philippi, to the church at Colossae, to the churches in the region of Galatia, to the church at Thessalonica. The assumption is those churches had elders, those churches had deacons. In some cases, like with Philippi, they had prophets at that time, before the transition. They...they...they knew who their people were.

Also, you can look at it from the other side, in Hebrews 13, the people are told to submit to those who are over you in the Lord. That's a formal relationship. There were some people who were literally over them in the Lord. That means that church membership says "I belong and I submit." I belong to this body of believers. I belong to this assembly of believers. I identify with them. And I come under the authority and the leadership of these shepherds and pastors.

I think it would have been sort of unnecessary and kind of radical and uncommon for somebody in the New Testament epistles to say, "Oh, by the way, join a church." It was assumed. "Forsake not the assembling of yourselves together as the manner of some, and much the more as you see the day approaching." What is the life of the church? What is the duty of the church member?

The duty of the church member is to serve one another, pray for one another, love one another. The duty of the church member is to grow in grace and in the knowledge of Christ under the teaching of the Word of God, to yield his or her soul up to the shepherding of those who had been given the oversight over them. And again Hebrews says, "You want to submit to them so they do their shepherding without grief because they have to give an account for this."

So while it identifies the accountability of the member, it also identifies the accountability of the shepherd. Somebody came to...I can't remember who it was, it may have been A.W. Tozer...some young pastor and said, "You know, my congregation's too small." And he said, "Maybe they're as large as you'd like to give account for in the day of judgment." So while there's accountability on the member's side, there's accountability on the shepherd's side.

And I think God models that. God models that in Matthew 18 where he says, "If you have a hundred sheep and one goes, you go after that sheep, because all heaven is concerned about that one." So I just think the assumption of the New Testament is that people belonged. They belonged at Colossae; they belonged to Thyatira, at Pergamos. And even those troubled churches: "Blessed are those who have not stained their garments," he says in those troubled churches. You know, this is counter-

culture right now, really counter-culture 'cause you've got this free-wheeling, independent thing.

Dr. Sinclair Ferguson, talking at our Truth and Life Conference this week and in a kind of little private little Q & A that we had, said, you go back...this won't matter to you, but Friedrich Schleiermacher, you know, sort of the father of Liberalism, and what he...what he...what he did, this would have been eighteenth century, you go back to him, a German guy, and he turns Christianity on its head, and he goes from making Christianity all about Christ, to making Christianity all about us, all about self. This is part of the Enlightenment, right? You turn from the church, the Dark Ages where the church dictates everything. You turn to self, this is the Enlightenment, and in the Enlightenment, you know, we discover man's mind and then you have Thomas Paine and the Age of Reason and everything turns to man and the church becomes man-centered, and that's what Liberalism is. So the legacy is that.

Well, you have the same thing happening in the market-driven church. It's the legacy of Schleiermacher; it's the legacy of generations and generations of a self-centered church. You can hear some people who are even evangelical preach, listen to them on the television, all they ever talk about is the benefits to the people sitting out there. If you're in pain, if you're in suffering, you know, Jesus wants to heal your wounds. It's all about you. I get so weary of this.

Or if you're poor, He wants to make you rich. Or if you're sick, He wants to heal you. You hear it all the time. Sometimes from charismatics; sometimes from non-charismatics. You would think that everything in the Christian church is geared to you rather than to Christ. And the church is a dispensary to meet my needs. Very selfish. How do you get people to sacrificially give their lives to minister to somebody else when that's the mentality? So they aren't Christ-focused; they aren't other-focused. They're self-absorbed. And what happens then is you get people just flitin' over here, going there, going there. I like the music over there; it's cool music over there; the guy's a cool dude over here. I like this guy over here because I like liturgy, blah-blah. That...that suits that independent "it's-about-me" mentality.

I was reading an article by—and I'm going to talk about this probably at Shepherds' Conference—David Wells, who has been a friend through the years, and he hit on something that I've been saying for a long time. And you know, there's this modern mantra that's coming out of young ministers is "the church has failed. The church has failed. You know, look at our culture. It's a mess; it's a disaster; it's immoral. Look how horrible it is. Now we've elected all these immoral people to run our country. The church has failed. The church has failed."

If the church has failed, it has failed in one area. It has failed in one area and one area alone, and that is, it's failed to be biblical. It's failed to be biblical. It's failed to be God-centered, Christ-centered. That's its failure. The church can't convert the lost. Only God can do that. Only the gospel can do that. Only the Word can do that. The church can't fix the world. The world's not going to get fixed.

America is not going to get fixed till Jesus comes. If the church has failed, it has failed to be God-centered, Christ-centered, Word-centered. That's where its failure lies. So we have a self-centered culture of people that treat the church like movies, or rock and roll concerts. They go where the action is, rather than committing themselves to a place where Christ is honored, God is honored, and the Word is exalted, and pouring their lives into people there sacrificially. That just doesn't fit the modern mood at all. And the latest group of kids is worse than the previous one, more self-centered, more self-absorbed. So you're going to have another generation of these self-absorbed people growing up. It doesn't speak well for church membership in the future because belonging assumes responsibility, accountability, faithfulness, ministry, fellowship, caring, sacrificing. But that's what the church is. That's what the church does. And the payback is for all that you give, you get that all back again in the dynamics of the life of the church.

I'm very concerned that a lot of young guys are having repeated events on weekends that attract people based on the music that aren't churches, but they call them churches. And they're not pastors because they aren't pastoring, they aren't shepherding. And they're appealing to people on a popular, cultural level, rather than on the level of what the church is. Why should we not forsake the assembling of ourselves together? Because we like the music? We should not forsake the assembling of ourselves together in order that we can stimulate one another to love and good works. That's the issue.

AUSTIN: So there's a....

JOHN: I would just say one other thing. I know you haven't asked about it, but I want to say this. There's a really important book, and I've talked to you about it. They call it *The Juvenilization of the Church*. *The Juvenilization of the Church* is a book of...it was a dissertation but it goes back in the 1950s when Youth for Christ was begun and Young Life, and I guess a little after that Campus Crusade came, started here at UCLA. And the idea was, you know, we're going to lose kids, we're going to lose kids. It was in the 1950s that the youth culture began to separate a little bit from parents. Up to that point, families were families, families were families. And all of a sudden the youth culture began to be isolated and marketed to. And so there were people who thought, "You know, we're going to lose this youth culture unless we start tweaking what we do." And so instead of a church service, they started having a youth service, and then they had a Youth for Christ service. And it was completely different than a church service. And here we are 60 years later and now church is designed for junior-highers. Church is designed for junior-highers.

I tell people all the time, we do adult church here. We do adult church for adults and young people. I, you know, I don't need to treat you like junior-high students. I don't need to entertain you. I don't need to drive your emotions with a bunch of racket and noise. I don't need to do that. This is adult church. We think, we reason, we look at the Word of God, we contemplate it, we meditate on it seriously. This isn't junior high. And I think there's so much of that out there that is basically driven at the emotion

and entertainment that feeds this self-centered kind of thing, “I want what I like,” that this is an uphill climb, church membership, but it’s right.

AUSTIN: Yeah, I think that’s...you’re identifying so many of the benefits of being a church member in opposition to all that the culture is offering and even so many churches are offering—a juvenile, an informal, casual approach. What are some of the dangers to not being a church?

JOHN: Yeah, well, you know, it works when you’re 19, 20, 21, 24, 25, and single. As soon as you get married and you have conflict in your marriage, that’s not going to work. As soon as you have a child with Down Syndrome that’s not going to work. When you lose your job and your wife gets terminal disease, you’re not going to go to the “Rock and Roll Church” for comfort. Who’s going to come around you, who’s going to love you, who’s going to support you, who’s going to minister to your sick child when you can’t? This is the church. Who’s going to bear your burdens and fulfill the law of Christ? This is superficial stuff. This is on the surface. This is for people...this is for people that have got their act together, or else those people who are looking for somebody, and it’s like a big dating service, in many cases.

But that’s not life. And, you know, look, I’ve...you all know this, but...I mean, we at Grace Church, we hear about this...I’ve talked to people quite frequently who are suffering through horrible illnesses and death. Dominick Pia, a little notice in the Grace Today about him dying. Well, I talked to his wife. I talked to him as well before he died, and Patricia was reading me a beautiful note today that came from his wife saying she couldn’t even express what it meant that this church had come around her and sustained her in the loss of her dear husband. He was in his fifties. This is life in the church. And this is the return that comes in the church.

You know, it’s a frightening culture that we live in, this single culture, because they have none of that. They’re single, a prolonged single. And so they have...they don’t have the benefits of marriage, they don’t have the blessings of children. They don’t have the joys of family and collective families. They’re out there as an island and you can entertain yourself...you can keep entertaining yourself but eventually that’s not going to...that’s not going to fill in the emptiness. That’s why I tell people all the time, get married, have babies, join a church.

AUSTIN: Amen.

JOHN: Amen

AUSTIN: Amen

JOHN: Yeah.

AUSTIN: And I think it's so helpful to think about how we have a church here that's not just young people. It's diverse, it's people from all different walks of life.

JOHN: Well, it's a church. It's a church. It's multi-generational, multi-racial. It's a church; we didn't build it. The Lord builds His church.

AUSTIN: And we're not watching you from 200 satellite locations.

JOHN: Oh no, that's really disgusting. (Laughter) I just had a discussion about that. You know, this idea that I'm preaching here and I'm going to be on twenty flat screens all over the place, that's not pastoring a church. How do they know their shepherd? How does he know his sheep? And how can the people say that he's blameless, above reproach, his family is in order? How do they even know what his character is? That's not pastoring. That's not a church. And that's not a pastor.

AUSTIN: And that's why we're grateful for you, John, because you are a pastor, and that's why we love you, and that's why we savor times like this. So it's probably time for you lead us in the Lord's Supper.

JOHN: Really, that went fast.

AUSTIN: Yeah, I know, I have...I have only 400 more questions.

JOHN: Would you like to do this next Sunday night, we'll do some more?

AUSTIN: If they're willing to come back. (Applause) It would be an honor, yeah.

JOHN: Okay.

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