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

Why I Love the Church
Scripture: Selected Scriptures
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I do want to talk to you about why I love the church briefly. It is not difficult to give your life to the church if you love it. And it's not at all difficult to love it if you understand it. But I think Michael Griffis(?) was right a number of years ago when he wrote his little book, Forgetful Pilgrims and he said, "Christians collectively seem to have suffered from a strange amnesia. They go to church but have forgotten what it's all about."

It seems strange to me that the church is in an identity crisis and can't figure out what it is or what it is supposed to be when the Bible is so absolutely clear. I love the church. I confess to that. I am inveterate and incurable lover of the church. It thrills me beyond anything and everything to serve the church. It is the supreme joy of my life to labor for the church, to spend my years on behalf of the church. I wouldn't trade for anything. And there are some reasons why that is true, and I will share a few of those with you tonight and we'll look at some texts to undergird them.

First of all, I love the church because the church is being built by the Lord Himself. The immutable, sovereign, faithful, omnipotent Lord of heaven whose Word can't return void but always accomplishes what He says, whose purpose always comes to pass, whose will is always fulfilled ultimately, whose plan is invincible and unshakable has spoken about building the church in no less than extremely triumphant words.

In Matthew chapter 16 and verse 18 He said, "I will build My church and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it." He who knows His sheep, whose names He wrote down before the foundation of the world, He will build His church. The gates of Hades, simply a Jewish expression for death. If Hades is the place of the dead, then the gate to Hades is what ushers you into that...just a simple picture of death. The most powerful weapon of Satan is the gates of Hades. We are reminded in Hebrews chapter 2 that he holds the power of death and by it keeps men in bondage all their lifetime. But even the power of death cannot prevent the Lord from building the church. It is the strongest weapon that Satan wields on to the sovereignty of God and it cannot touch the church. The church will be built. It is His church, "I will build My church."

I want to go a little deeper into that and have you turn to Titus chapter 1, if you will, in your Bibles....Titus chapter 1. As Paul opens up this marvelous epistle he says, "Paul, a bondservant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ," and he identifies himself in those two ways. First of all, he is a slave of God and the very character of that slavery or the specific task that he bears as a slave is to

be an apostle on behalf of Jesus Christ. He is God's slave given the duty of being a messenger for Christ.

With regard to that he says this, "For the faith of those chosen of God and the knowledge of the truth which is according to godliness, in the hope of eternal life which God who cannot lie promised...and the original language says...before time began."

Now these two verses outline for us the nature of all really biblical ministry. Paul, as a servant of God and a messenger of Jesus Christ, was set really to accomplish three things. First, a ministry of salvation, a ministry of evangelism which he speaks of in these words, "For the faith of those chosen of God." He had the task of preaching the gospel so that the elect in hearing the gospel would believe. He was preaching the gospel for the faith of those chosen of God. He had an evangelistic aspect to his ministry, to bring about the understanding of the gospel in order that when faith would come as a gift from God, sinners chosen by God might be justified.

Secondly he says, there was not only a salvation emphasis or an evangelism emphasis but a sanctification and an edification emphasis which he describes as, "The knowledge of the truth which is according to godliness." In addition to bringing the gospel to the elect so they might believe, he wanted to bring the saved to the fullness of the knowledge of the truth so that they might become godly. He was then committed to evangelism and edification.

And then the third aspect of his ministry would be consolation, "In the hope of eternal life." He was bringing to people the hope of glorification which becomes for the pilgrim through this world the great source of consolation.

And so his ministry focused on justification, sanctification and glorification. He preached that word of the gospel which mixed with faith produces justification. He preached that word of truth which mixed with obedience produced sanctification. He preached that great hope of eternal life and glory which mixed with hope produces consolation.

In other words, that's really God's redemptive purpose, to save, sanctify, glorify, to take us all the way from being chosen by Him in eternity past to being glorified. Through salvation, sanctification to glorification, that is the great unfolding comprehensive redemptive purpose of God.

Now having said that, the main thing I want you to notice is the end of verse 2. He says, "Which God," this whole plan, this whole redemptive, saving, sanctifying, glorifying plan, "which God who cannot lie promised before time began." What this tells us is that in eternity past, before there was ever created anything that is created, before time began, God determined to begin and to finish His redemptive plan. People were chosen. Their names were written down that they might be brought to faith, to godliness and to glory. God promised this before time began.

Now the question that struck me as I read that is to whom did God make the promise? There weren't any people around. And the best understanding of the creation of angels would place their creation some time near the creation of the rest of the universe. And so if we are behind creation, pre-creation, to whom did God make this promise? That's a very compelling question. To whom did God make this pledge? This covenant?

Turn to 2 Timothy chapter 1 and we find there a very helpful insight. Verse 8 ends with the word "God," God becomes the antecedent to verse 9. "God who has saved us," 2 Timothy 1:9, "God who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works but according to His own purpose and grace which was granted us in Christ Jesus," and here's the exact same phrase in the Greek, "before time began." This whole promise, this whole pledge, this whole covenant, this whole purpose of redemption, salvation, holy calling, this whole gracious saving enterprise was granted by the Father to the Son before time began.

Now what that tells us is this, that the promise that the Father made, the promise that God made, He made to the Lord Jesus Christ. This is a staggering reality, absolutely staggering. In the trinity, in the mystery of the trinity there is an ineffable love, an indescribable and inexplicable love that those members of the trinity share. Jesus alludes to it in His high priestly prayer when He asks the Father to love His own the way He loves Him and asks that they might share in the mutual love between the Son and the Father.

That love must find its expression. You can give without loving, but you cannot love without giving. And the Father in a demonstration of this indescribable, supernatural, perfect love expressed to the Son a desire to manifest that love in a very unique way. This is certainly where you have the origination of what Hebrews 13:20 calls "the eternal covenant," for the Father makes a pledge to the Son because of His love for Him. And what is that pledge? He promises to the Son that He will give to Him a redeemed humanity, justified, sanctified and glorified. That in fact He will bring that humanity to glory, to dwell in the very place where they dwell before time began, a timeless place, an uncreated place...the very realm of God. That's the promise. And why? Because the Father loves the Son so greatly He wants to grant this redeemed humanity to Him as an expression of His love.

With that thought in mind, turn to John chapter 6 and this becomes even more profound. In John chapter 6 and verse 37 Jesus identifies for us right here the crucial heart of His ministry. John 6:37, Jesus says, "All that the Father gives Me shall come to Me." Beloved, there in that one statement is the invincibility of the church. All that the Father gives to Me will come to Me. Every individual ever redeemed, ever...every individual ever granted the gift of faith, every individual ever forgiven and justified before God by grace is a gift from the Father to the Son, everyone. It isn't that you were bouncing down the street one day and got smart enough to get yourself saved. It isn't that you considered all your options and picked the best one by your human ingenuity. Rather every individual

whoever comes to faith is a love gift from the Father to the Son, a part of a redeemed humanity who is given to the Son for a very expressed purpose.

And what is that purpose? Well, that's easy, all you have to do is move in to the book of Revelation and look into heaven and see what people are doing there. What are they...what are the glorified saints doing? Worshiping the Lamb and glorifying the Lamb, and praising the Lamb, and serving the Lamb. And that is the fullness of God's purpose. God in eternity past before creation determined that He would give to the Son a redeemed humanity who ultimately would be brought into the uncreated glory where the trinity dwells for the express purpose of glorifying and praising and honoring and worshiping the Son forever and ever and ever...and serving Him. That was the Father's expression of love...the most wonderful way that He could do it. Oh, He created the angels, they too worship the Son, but this is unique because this is a redeemed humanity and their purpose is to glorify the Son forever.

And so He says in verse 37, "All that the Father gives Me shall come to Me and obviously the one who comes to Me I will certainly not...what?...cast out." I mean, is He going to turn down a love gift from the Father? Is He going to say no to one whom the Father gives Him? No. In verse 38 He says, "I have come down from heaven not to do My own will but the will of Him who sent Me."

Now in this covenant the Son had a part to play. It wasn't just the Father. The Father said, "I want to give You this redeemed humanity as an expression of My love and I'll bring them all the way to perfection, all the way to glory and they'll spend forever and ever and ever and ever glorifying and praising Your name. There's just one thing I need You to do and that is to go into the world, become one of them, pay the penalty for their sins." And when Jesus says in verse 38, "I've come down from heaven not to do My own will but the will of Him who sent Me," He does not mean that He's against this, that it's not His will, He's unwillingly or reluctantly submitting. All He means is, "I'm coming to fulfill a plan that the Father has devised." He doesn't mean here on Thursday I'm to do this, and next Tuesday I'm to do this, and next Friday...no. He's simply saying, "I've come down to do the one thing necessary and that is provide the atoning sacrifice that this humanity might be redeemed." And you know as well as I that that atonement of Jesus Christ stretched all the way back to cover all the sins of all who believed before He died as well as all who believe after He died.

And then in verse 39, "And this is the will of Him who sent Me, that of all that He has given Me I lose...what?...the Father says to Him...don't lose any of them, and Jesus says...I won't." "And I will raise him up on the last day, for this is the will of My Father that everyone who beholds the Son and believes in Him may have eternal life, and I Myself will raise Him up on the last day." You want to know something? All the saints are ultimately going to be glorified not because God said so only, but because Jesus will make it so. That's the plan.

Down to verse 44, "No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him. And I'll raise him up on the last day." Every individual who has ever come to faith is a love gift from the Father to the Son. We're caught up in something so monumental, so vast, so transcendent, it is almost as if my salvation and your salvation is somewhat incidental, that the real issue here is not to get us to heaven, but to express love from the Father to the Son. We're...we're...we're just the gift. When I want to show my love to someone, I might give them a gift. I might give my wife a gift. I might give my children a gift, my friends. They don't love the gift. They might enjoy the gift but what matters to them is the love of the giver. Isn't that it? And that's exactly this. We're somewhat like the gift. I mean, the whole issue is not us, the issue is this trinitarian love relationship in which we are privileged to participate.

Now the Father isn't done with just that. There's something more to be said. Romans 8:29 and 30, someone told me long time ago, and I guess it's sort of axiomatic that the supreme compliment, the supreme form of flattery is imitation. And we know that today. When somebody has a hero they imitate them. And in verse 29, I want you to notice this, "For whom He foreknew he also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son." This is incredible. The Father determined before time began in His foreknowledge and predestination that He would bring together a redeemed humanity. He would save them, sanctify them, glorify them and bring them to heaven so that forever and ever and ever they could say, "Worthy is the Lamb...worthy is the Lamb...worthy is the Lamb," and praise the Son forever and ever and serve the Son forever and ever. And there's one more component, they would be made like the Son. As much as it is possible for redeemed humanity to be like incarnate deity, we will be like Jesus Christ so that...verse 29..."He might be the prototokos among many brethren." The prototokos meaning not the first one born in chronology, but the premier one. So that He might be the supreme one over a whole brotherhood of those who are like Him. And we know that's what John said, "When we shall see Him we shall be...what?...like Him."

The apostle Paul said, "I press toward the mark for the prize of the upward call." What is the prize of the upward call? When you're called up, it's pretty simple to understand, when you get called up, what's the prize? Christ's likeness. Christ's likeness is the prize. Paul is saying I press toward the goal right now which is the prize later on. In other words, if the prize for my life is when I'm called up is to be like Christ, that's the goal right now, too. If that's the purpose for which God redeemed me, to make me into the image of His Son, then that should be my goal right now. And that's why Paul says, for example, to the Galatians, "I am in travail until Christ is fully formed in you." That's why he says, "For me to live is Christ." That's why he says, "That I may know Him." The one thing in his life that he pursued was Christ's likeness, because that was the reason God saved him, that was the whole point. In fact he says in Philippians chapter 3, "That I pursue that for which God pursued me." And why did God pursue him? "To make him like His Son." So what is the goal of his life? To become like His Son. That's the goal in eternity, that becomes the goal in time. The goal is to make an elect and redeemed humanity like Jesus Christ. And God will bring it to pass.

You know, it's like the guy who said to me, who was commenting about Christianity triumphing, he said simply, "I read the book and in the end we all win." It's true. The church is invincible. It's absolutely invincible. The purposes of God cannot be thwarted.

There's a kind of a conclusion to this, just to condense it a little bit. Turn to 1 Corinthians 15. First Corinthians 15, let's go clear to the end and see. The Lord is going to bring, we'll go to verse 24 for a moment...when the Son has done everything, verse 24 of 1 Corinthians 15, "Then comes the end, when He delivers up the Kingdom to the God and Father." In the end the Lord is going to say...Okay, I raised them all up, I provided salvation, I provided the Spirit for sanctification, and I raised them all up, here they are, Father, I give them to You. He's going to deliver them all to the Father. And the Father is going to at that point give them to the Son as a love gift. They're Yours. They're going to praise You forever and ever.

Go to verse 27, here you come to the very end. "He has put all things in subjection under His feet." When He says "all things are put in subjection," it is evident that He has accepted who put all things in subjection to Him, that is God's not going to be in subjection to Christ, and when all things are subjected to Christ then the Son Himself also will be subjected to the One who subjected all things to Him that God may be all in all.

You say, "What in the world is that saying?" It's saying this, when the Son brings the whole redeemed humanity to glory and the Father gives them all to the Son as a love gift, the Son will turn around and give it all, including Himself, back to the Father.

This is a mind-boggling thing. This is what we're all caught up in, folks...an immense, transcendent, incomprehensible expression of love within the trinity of which we are the gifts exchanged. I love the church because the Lord is building it Himself. It's His.

And it's enough for me, frankly, to just be a part of it, small church, big church, medium-sized church, happy church, sad church, it's just enough to be a part of it. I feel like Paul in 2 Corinthians 2, you know, where he was so sad in that letter but he says, "God always causes us to triumph in Christ." It's enough to march in the triumph, he says, it's enough to be in the parade, folks. I mean, it's enough to wear the uniform, that's all...I don't care. And frankly, that the end is already determined. I'm just privileged to be marching with the troops. That's enough. What do I need beyond that?

Well, second reason that I love the church is because the church is the Lord's most precious reality on earth...the most precious reality on earth. You say, "How do you know that?" Because it demanded the highest price, right? "For you're redeemed not with corruptible things like silver and gold, but with the precious blood of Christ as a lamb without blemish, without spot," 1 Peter 1:18 and 19. Acts 20:28, "Purchased with His blood." First Corinthians 6:19 and 20, "Bought with a price."

How precious is the church? Well, precious...so precious that the Son was willing to come to die in obedience to the Father so the love gift could become a reality. One verse really...well two verses, really say it all. Go to 2 Corinthians, we'll just comment on one and then I'll look at the other one, more important, 2 Corinthians 8:9, "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ that though He was rich..." what does that mean? It means He was rich as God is rich. Not talking about earthly riches, not talking about material things. When it says He was rich it means He was rich as God is rich. He was rich in His preincarnate glory. "Yet for your sake He became poor." That does not mean earthly poverty, anymore than it meant earthly riches. He went from sovereign supernatural deity, with all the richness, to humbling Himself to becoming a man. It's the poverty of being human, not the...not the idea of the fact that He was poor economically. You certainly do understand, don't you, that the economics of Jesus had nothing to do with redemption? It wouldn't have mattered whether He was the poorest man in town, or the richest when it comes to redemption. His economic status played no part. It was the poverty that He experienced in the sense that He was divested of all the prerogatives of deity that were set aside in His incarnation, and went all the way to the agony of the cross and said, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" That's poverty and that's the kind of poverty viewed here. So when you talk about the fact that the church is precious, the value of the church is seen here in the price that was paid when the One who was as rich as God in fullness of glory is rich, who became as poor as poor can be when one is alienated from God, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me," and He did it that you through His poverty might become rich. How rich? As rich as God is rich because you've become a joint...what?...joint heir.

It's an absolutely incredible verse...an absolutely incredible verse. The gospel, the incarnation, the condescension of Christ for the purpose of redeeming the Father's elect, the Father's elect love gifts to Him had nothing to do with His economic condition and everything to do with the fact that He came all the way down to being alienated from the God He loved. Frankly the gospel can be no more equated with the financial poverty of Jesus than it can be equated with His pain on the cross. Such matters may tug at the heart of human emotion and elicit sympathy, but they have nothing to do with salvation. He became poor not by giving up earth's riches, but by giving up heaven's so that you might gain them.

In 2 Corinthians 5:21 it is stated as explicitly as it can be stated what the work of Christ was. Second Corinthians 5:21, you ask how poor? What is this poverty that He endured? This terrible, terrible condescension, "He made Him who knew no sin," now there's only one person who qualifies there, Jesus, so that's not hard to interpret, "God made Jesus the sinless one, the one who knew no sin, to be sin on our behalf that we might become the righteousness of God in Him." That's how poor He became. God, to fulfill the plan, took the One who knew no sin and made Him sin on our behalf that we might become the righteousness of God in Him. This is so powerful. This is the doctrine of imputation. Let me see if I can't tell you ever so briefly what it's saying here.

In what way did God make Jesus sin? Well, some modern charismatic false teachers say that on the cross Jesus became a sinner and had He had to go to hell for three days to pay the penalty for His sins. That is blasphemy. On the cross Jesus did not become a sinner. He was not guilty of any sin ever, not even when He was dying on the cross. He committed no sin ever. When He hung on the cross He was absolutely innocent. No sin could be put to His account, He had no capacity to commit any sin. He did not become a sinner.

You say, "What happened?" Very simply, God treated Him as if He had committed personally every sin ever committed by every person who ever believed. Can you grasp that thought? God treated Jesus Christ on the cross as if He had committed every sin ever committed by every person who ever believed. And God heaped the full fury of a just wrath on Him as if He were guilty of all of it, when the fact is He was guilty of none of it. But God poured out His fury so that all that sin was sufficiently expiated and could never be held against those who believe.

Now that's the first half of imputation. But there's a second half. He treated Jesus as if He had committed every sin ever committed by every person who would ever believe, and He did it for us, "In order that we might become...what?...the righteousness of God." Are you ready for this? Jesus was not a sinner on the cross. And I'll tell you something else, you're not righteous...you're not righteous. You're not anymore righteous than Jesus was sinful. God treated Jesus as if He was a sinner, and He treats you as if you are righteous. He wasn't, and you're not and neither am I. That's imputation. I'm not righteous, I'm still sinful. I have to say with Paul, "O wretched man that I am," don't I? "Who is going to deliver me from the body of this death? Things I want to do I don't do, the things I don't want to do I do." I'm not righteous...are you ready for this?...but God treats me as if I possessed the perfect righteousness of Jesus Christ. Is that astonishing? Well, it is if you know me. Certainly it is if God knows me.

You see, that's the doctrine of imputation. That's what we're talking about here. God treats Jesus as if He had committed all our sins and treats us as if we had only done all His righteousness. That's the price.

To fulfill the Father's plan it had to be so. The sin had to be paid for and the righteousness had to be given. One who was not a sinner had to be treated as if He were, and those who are not righteous can be treated as if they are.

Why did Jesus come down and endure this horrible humiliation, separation? Why? It had to be so to fulfill the Father's plan. I know we think that He did it just for us. No, no He did it for God. Some time ago I preached a message entitled, "Christ Died for God." We're just...the gift gets passed back and forth.

Is the church precious? Sure, because it bears the very righteousness of Jesus Christ imputed to it since its sins have been imputed to Him. It's an incredible reality. That is why Matthew 18 warns us to be careful how we treat each other, doesn't it? Because how you treat another believer, Jesus says, is how you treat Me.

I love the church. I love the church because the Lord is building it Himself. I love it because it's the most precious thing on earth, Jesus paid the price for His church. This is a precious church. That's why Matthew 18 says, "If you cause another Christian to stumble, you'd be better off with a millstone put around your neck and be drowned in the sea," right? You better be careful how you treat these precious people. You better be careful not to despise the least of these little ones. You better be careful not to cause another believer to stumble, you're...you're touching Christ. He that is joined to the Lord is one spirit, 1 Corinthians 6:17.

Well let me give you a third, maybe we have time for this. I love the church because the church is the only earthly expression of heaven...it is the only earthly expression of heaven. You know, if you based it on some people's church experience, they would think that heaven was some kind of a shallow, flippant place for entertainment...superficial, clever, indifferent and man-centered. Boy, that sounds blasphemous, doesn't it?

We pray this prayer all the time, "Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." When is that going to happen? In the United States Congress? I don't think so. In the White House? I don't think so. In the Supreme Court? No. In the university? No. City Hall? No. Where is God's will done on earth as it is in heaven? Only one place, there can only be one place, that's the church. Now you have to ask the question...what goes on in heaven? If...if....were heaven to come down, what goes on in heaven? Well, worship, would you agree? Praise, adoration, and it all flows to God, it is all directed at God. Read in Revelation chapter 4, chapter 5, chapter 19, all around the throne...worship, worship, worship, worship...the worship of God.

Secondly, another thing goes on in heaven and that's the exaltation of Christ...the exaltation of Christ. He is the...He is the adored Son in glory. He sits at the Father's right hand. You see the Lamb right in the throne, don't you, in Revelation. He is exalted and adored in an unabashed wonder.

A third thing that is true about heaven is the presence of absolute purity...absolute purity. It is a holy place. You come to the end of the book of Revelation, for example, and it becomes crystal clear that nobody is going to get in there who isn't holy...no unclean thing, no one who practices abomination and lying shall ever come into it, the end of chapter 21. Chapter 22, outside, verse 15, are dogs and sorcerers and immoral persons and murderers and idolaters and everyone who loves and practices lying...you don't get in there. It's the place of purity.

Now if we want to bring heaven done, what are we all about? I think we're all about the worship of God, the exaltation of Jesus Christ, and the pursuit of holiness. That's what we're all about. And we're so utterly unlike anything on this earth as to be absolutely distinct.

Look at Matthew 18, just one illustration of this, Matthew 18:15 talks about dealing with sin on the issue of holiness, and we'll just...we'll just look at this and close with one other comment. In Matthew 18:15, "If your brother sins, you go approve him in private. If he listens to you, you've won your brother. If he doesn't listen to you, take two or more with you. If he still doesn't listen...verse 17...tell the church. If he still doesn't listen, put him out." Then verse 18, "Truly I say to you, whatever you shall bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven. And whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven." What is that?

Well binding and loosing was an old rabbinical expression which was used with regard to dealing with people on the matter of sin and repentance. And when a person was confronted about their sin and they wouldn't repent of their sin and they refused to turn from their sin, then the rabbi would say to them, "You're bound in sin." It was simply a declaration of the fact. But if they repented and had remorse, confessed that sin and turned from it, he would say, "You were loosed from your sin." And in a discipline situation that's what you're doing. Those who repent, you can say you're loosed from your sin. And those who will not repent you say, you're bound in your sin. And when the church says that on earth, it is simply saying here what heaven has already said. Heaven has already rendered that verdict, we bring heaven down. Never is the church more heavenly than when it is confronting sin...never. You can't minimize sin in the church and at the same time say "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." We literally act in perfect harmony with heaven when we deal with sin. Heaven is already rendering those verdicts.

The church then is the only earthly expression of heaven. People ought to walk in here and say, "I have never experienced anything like this." They shouldn't walk in and say, "Ah, I feel comfortable here. This sounds familiar. It's a pretty groovy deal here." What? So unlike anything they've ever experienced has to be shockingly different. This is the closest we get to heaven.

Another thing about heaven is fellowship with the saints, right? That's what we're all about. Heaven is a place of worship toward God, exaltation of Christ, pursuit of holiness, sweet, perfect harmonious fellowship. Let the world see that so they can really see the reality of the power of God.

One last comment. I can't leave this. I've said enough about it this week, so I don't need to extend my comments. Fourthly, the church is the source of truth...the church is the source of truth. We're the voice of God in the world. I love what Paul said to Timothy. "The church...1 Timothy 3:15...which is the pillar and foundation of the truth." If we do anything, we hold up the truth. It ought to be said when people walk in a church they hear the truth. The impressive Temple of Diana, one of the Seven

Wonders of the World was in Ephesus. One of its features were...was its pillars, it had 127 of them, each one was a gift from a different king. Every one was marble. All was studded with jewels, overlaid with gold. Every pillar was a tribute to the king who gave it and they held up an immense roof. This massive roof was upheld by these pillars. And as the pillars of the Temple of Diana were testimony to the gross errors of false religion, the church is to be the pillar that holds up the truth. It is the solemn responsibility of every church to lift up the truth and hold it high. And really with it to smash the ideological fortresses of Satan's lies. We have a stewardship of truth not to be tampered with, not to be depreciated, not to be misrepresented, not to be abandoned and not to be altered. It is the sacred saving treasure given to us so that the unfolding redemptive plan of God may come to pass.

Psalm 119 the psalmist said, "My heart stands in awe of Thy Word." So it should be. Well, let's pray.

Father, we thank You for such a wonderful day and wonderful time tonight to think about some of these great truths. Lord, it's enough for us just to be in the army just to wear the uniform, just to be so privileged to march in the triumph, in the victory of an invincible church. It's enough, why should we ever ask for more? Lord, give us a love for Your church, this wonderful love gift that You're giving to the Son who in turn will give it back to You. May we love it because it's Yours. May we love it because of the price paid by our dear Savior who was treated as if He had committed every sin committed by every person who would ever believe in order that we might be treated as if we committed every righteous deed Christ Himself has ever done. Such condescension for such unworthy sinners is beyond our understanding, but we rejoice in the preciousness of the church that You would do this for us. And then, Lord, we thank You so much that we can be a taste of heaven on earth, that we can be the only heaven people will see here. O may it be so. May it be that the distinction is so clear that people feel like they have walked into a place the likes of which they've never known and wonder what transforming reality could create this. May we be committed to the things heaven is committed to, worshiping You, exalting Christ unashamedly, pursuing holiness and sweetly fellowshiping. To that end we pray, Lord, that You might be glorified in Your church of which You are so worthy and we pray in Jesus' precious and wonderful name. Amen.

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