

Personal Commitment to the Church, Part 2

Selected Scriptures

80-247

Last Lord's day we set apart the day to talk about commitment to the church. And I told you that I wanted to follow it up this morning as well. We are in the middle of our study of the gospel of Luke and we'll get back to that next Lord's day and I'm very eager to enter into the seventh chapter of Luke, which you're going to find fascinating. But it was appropriate last Lord's day to address the issue of the church. Every so often I think we need to sort of reidentify ourselves and I asked those of you who were interested in response to the truth of God's Word about the church to pick up a yellow card and go and pick up a packet that was an application to join Grace Community Church. Something over 500 people did that and I thank you so much for that response. That's nothing short of amazing.

And as I said last week, it may be that so many people respond when I say this because I don't say it often enough. And so we sort of collect people who don't understand the need to be involved with the church as real members coming under the authority of the elders, belonging, identifying, co-laboring and all of those things that we talked about last time. But I'm very gratified by that. At the same time I wanted to follow it up with one more message and one more opportunity for those of you who are still thinking about it or who weren't here last week, and I was encouraged to do so.

And so this morning I want to go back over some foundational things about the church because I want you to understand why this church is the way it is. I've been here a long time in this church, well over 30 years. I came here in my twenties, that's a long time ago. I've passed the sixty milestone. I felt just as energetic, just as strong and far more capable than I did when I came, believe me. God has through these years done exceeding, abundantly above all I could ever ask or think with regard to this church. Many things have changed in my life through the years as I have learned more about the Word of God, as God has shaped and formed me, made me more the man that He wants me to be. I have lived through the pilgrimage not only of my own life but the life of my wife, my children, my grandchildren. I've lived through the pilgrimage of the people around me, many, many of you. And in many cases I've lived through the pilgrimage of some of our congregation who were born after I came and died before now. So I've gone from the cradle to the grave with some folk in our congregation. I've gone through all the vicissitudes and struggles of life and I've gone through all the various seasons of the church. There have been many summers in this church and times of growth and flourishing. There have been many falls, times of slow kind of fading. There have been winters in the church when we suffered a dark times. There have been spring times in the church when things began to grow again. I've gone through all of those seasons that mark the life of a church. I've gone through many different staff people in the church. It seems to be our plan to train ministers here who work with me and then eventually send them off to reproduce somewhere else what they've learned here. And that's been a tremendous joy. I've worked through all of these things. I've seen various groups of elders. Some stay the whole time, some go to other places and others take their place.

And through all of this pilgrimage there have been many changing things. One thing has never changed and that is my understanding of the church it has never changed because it is not subject to anything that comes on the scene. It is, to put it another way, irrelevant to me what the culture expects. It is irrelevant to me what the culture wants. The ways of the world have changed greatly in 30-plus years. That hasn't had any effect on the church. The style of life has changed greatly in these 30-plus years. That hasn't had any effect upon this church. This church doesn't look to the culture for its cues. It doesn't look to the society to find out what it ought to be. It doesn't invent itself in some way as a reaction to what is going on around us. It matters not at all to me with regard to the church what life styles there are in this culture. It doesn't matter to me what the expectations of the culture are. It doesn't matter to me whatsoever what the demographics of our society are. I'm not interested in the opinions of focus groups. I really don't care about polls at all. Not interested in surveys, not interested in market evaluations, not interested in the buying habits of people, it really doesn't matter to me at all whether or not society says everything has to be resolved in a half hour because it is on television. Or once in a while major problems can be resolved in one hour, like big crimes. And problems that threaten the entire world can be resolved in a two-hour movie. And everything then has to have a quick resolution, an easy resolution and that's how people think. It doesn't matter to me that people think in terms of everything being resolved in a half hour, an hour or in case of something that's worldwide in two hours, which is one of the reasons why people expect even a war to be over in two hours. It doesn't matter to me that people think like that. It's not relevant to what I do. It doesn't matter to me that the material character of our nation has changed in these 30 years, the expectations of people has changed, their definitions of success have changed. It's not relevant to me that the media has the power that it has today and that it's changing and changing people's thinking. That is not what drives me. That's not what drives this church. And it's not what defines this church.

One thing defines this church. It is this, what does the New Testament say about a church? The New Testament is an old book but it is not just an old book, it is the Word of God. It is the message of the Lord of the church to the church. And the way the church was defined in the New Testament is as valid and necessary and appropriate today as it was in the first century when the church was launched at Pentecost. Nothing changes that. So I don't need to be fussing around in the community to try to fit myself in with the shifting changing styles. I don't need to be adapting uncertain and simplistic and naive theologies that accommodate contemporary expectations.

I look around at churches and I wish they felt the same way. I see the churches across our country in a severe identity crisis trying to reinvent themselves in cultural terms, trying to reinvent themselves in marketing strategies, trying to reinvent themselves in new sociological definitions in order somehow to find their way into the lives of unbelieving people. Those things have never interested me, never paid any attention to them frankly. One thing drives my ministry, one thing drives the ministry of all those who are around me in this church and it is this, biblical theology of the church. What does the Scripture say about the church? That's what drives me. And I think for many people who have sort of experienced the church in many places and many locations as many of you have, you go from point to point to point and the style changes so much it can become very frustrating. You see the identity crisis. My desk is full of mail every week of my life from people who are disappointed in their church. I hear that conversation constantly. I respond to that kind of thing all the time. And then the mailbags at Grace To You continue to tell the sad story of the church's identity crisis.

I don't want to get technical about it because I don't think you need to be technical but I do believe that we have to understand one thing, this church is driven by what the New Testament says about

the church. We want to be the church that the Lord identifies in the Scripture. That's what we've been mandated to do. So here we are in all these years in all the shifting sands of the world around us have had virtually no effect on what we do. I'm asked an awful lot, "What secular publications do I read so I can stay in touch with people's needs and know how to preach?" Well I'm not oblivious to the world around me. I can see what you can see, I can hear what you can hear, occasionally read a Newsweek magazine, Time magazine, World magazine, a Christian world view on those kinds of matters, political and social. But those things don't inform me. You don't hear that in my sermon very often. That's not where I get the truth that I want to bring to you.

What rules my life is the Scripture. I am driven by and I am confined to the theology of the church in the New Testament. And I say that to you because I want you to understand that that's what this church is all about. That's what it's all about. What you're going to find in this church, what you've already found in this church that's why you're here is that we are biblical. We're not driven by the desires of the unconverted. We are not confined by the limitations of the carnal, or the immature. What defines us is what the Lord of the church has said about His church. And it's wonderfully blessed to me to see us not only survive the shifting sands of cultural change, but to ride across the top of them and to see the church continue to flourish.

Now when you think about the church you have to think in foundational, theological terms. And I want to lay these before you simply so that you will understand what are the foundation stones of this church. I could get complicated about this but I don't need to, so what I'm going to do is tell you there are five doctrines that provide the substantial basis for the church, five doctrines without which you can't understand the church, five doctrines and not one of them can be eliminated. They are the doctrines as follows: the doctrine of election, the doctrine of identification, the doctrine of purification, the doctrine of revelation and the doctrine of restoration. Now I hope you can jot those down and remember them...election, identification, purification, revelation, restoration.

If you can understand those five doctrines and, of course, most of you do, you understand then what drives the church biblically...biblically. Now obviously this morning I can't go into all of the facets of all of these great doctrines. I couldn't...I couldn't cover one of those doctrines thoroughly in a ten-week series, so I can't cover five of them in one message with any...any depth. But what I want to do is just set them down for your thinking.

When you consider joining a church, when you consider belonging to a church this is what you're looking for. These are the doctrines that should be being proclaimed. They should be the parameters that frame the church, that confine the church and that define the church. And, of course, to understand these doctrines there must be a commitment to precision in interpreting the Bible...precision in interpreting the Bible. Not only precision in interpreting the Bible, that is to say you take every word and deal with it precisely and carefully, but there must be a general commitment to the totality of what the Bible says about these issues. Let me tell you what theology is.

A theology is simply the sum of all that the Bible teaches about a given subject. If I mention sin then I say I want to talk about the theology of sin, I mean I want to bring together all that the Bible says about sin so that we can see the doctrine of sin in its totality. As you know, we go through verse by verse by verse by verse but there aren't any singular verses that give us everything about a given subject. There's not one passage that I can go to that says everything about the church. There's not one passage that says all that can be said about these five doctrines. So when we say we're going to teach the doctrine of the church, or the doctrine of election, or the doctrine of identification, or

purification, or these other matters, what we're saying is we're going to give you the sum of all the teaching about a given theme. If I were to teach you the theology of angels, I would be telling you everything the Scripture says about angels. If I want to talk about the theology of heaven, I would be telling you everything the Bible says about heaven. We're going to be looking then at the theology of the church but we can't cover everything in the church and we're going to be looking at five theological sub-categories. We can't cover all of them but at least we can identify them. For many of you, you know this, we've covered it in the past, you're very much aware of it. But because there's so many new people in our church, it's incumbent upon us to reestablish these issues.

Let's begin with the doctrine of election. You cannot understand the church unless you understand the doctrine of election. Just mentioning that word, I know I open the proverbial Pandora's box, election is a controversial doctrine. There's absolutely no reason for it to be controversial, it is crystal clear in the Scripture, it is taught in the Scripture repeatedly. It is taught not only in the Old Testament, it is taught in the New Testament. It is taught in the gospels. It is taught in the epistles. It is clear that the Scripture indicates the doctrine of election, or as its sometimes called predestination, using a word from Ephesians chapter 1. And you cannot understand the church unless you understand that the church is a group of believers called by God based upon His choice before creation. That's the doctrine of election, that God before He created anybody or anything, including angels, wrote down the names of certain people who would belong to Him forever. That's the doctrine of election. And Scripture makes it absolutely clear.

Let's begin in Matthew 16. As I said, we can't cover all of this and I'm not going to get too detailed, but I want to give you the general sense of this great doctrine. If you want more information on this, you can get the tape series I did on the doctrine of election. There are many messages that will help you with that. But in Matthew chapter 16 and verse 18 you have this remarkable statement by Jesus in the middle of the verse where Jesus says, "I will build My church." Now that is a statement of absolute certainty. It defines the fact that He will build the church but not just the church, My church. That's a very intimate pronoun. The church which is Mine, I will build My church. There is certainty.

And then the following statement, "The gates of Hades shall not overpower it," is a statement of invincibility. The greatest weapon that Satan has, according to Hebrews 2:14, is death and the greatest way that he could attempt to thwart the purpose of Christ in building the church would be through death, through killing people. But even that great weapon, death, the gates of Hades is an expression referring to death, Hades is where the dead go, the gates are how you get there and that's how you get there, by dying, so death itself cannot stop Me from building My church.

Here is the Son of God saying I will build the church that belongs to Me and not the greatest weapon that Satan has can stop that. There is certainty and invincibility in that. And that suits the language of Isaiah. Look at Isaiah chapter 44. In Isaiah chapter 44 we have a tremendous insight into God's purposes and the certainty with which they come to pass. Isaiah 44 and verse 6, "Thus says the Lord the King of Israel and His Redeemer, the Lord of host." There's God and the Son of God. There's the two members of the trinity, the Lord the King of Israel and His Redeemer, the Lord of Host, meaning the Son of God. He says, "I am the first, I am the last." That is to say He is the beginning and the end. He brackets time and all that it contains. He is before and after. "And there is no God besides Me and who is like Me? Let him proclaim and declare it, yes let him recount it to Me in order from the time that I established the ancient nation and let them declare to them the things that are coming and the things that are going to take place." If anybody says he's God, then let him tell the future. Let him determine the future. Let him proclaim, declare it, even though it hasn't happened.. I am God and I

will tell you the future. I will tell you what is coming. I will tell you the events that are going to take place. Verse 8 says, "Do not tremble, do not be afraid. Have I not long since announced it to you and declared it? And you are My witnesses. Is there any God besides Me? Is there any other rock? I know of none." There is no other God. God alone determines the future. He proclaims it. He declares it. He brings it to pass.

Over in chapter 46 of Isaiah God again affirms this. Isaiah 46, unforgettable portion of Scripture beginning in verse 8. "Remember this and be assured, recall it to mind you, transgressors. Remember the former things long passed for I am God and there is no other. I am God and there is no one like Me." And here's why. "Declaring the end from the beginning." In other words, at the beginning I can tell you the end. "And from ancient times I can tell you things which haven't been done saying My purpose will be established and I will accomplish all My good pleasure." And then the end of verse 11, "I have planned it, I will do it." That is God. God is the one who predetermines everything. And what God predetermines and declares He brings to fulfillment. He planned it, He does it. Jesus said, "I will build My church," and He will do it and nothing will be able to hinder or thwart it. This is all bound up in the purposes of God. God had determined that there would be a redeemed humanity and God set about to call that redeemed humanity to Himself and He did it. He is even now still doing it.

To see how this unfolds, look at Titus chapter 1 because in Titus 1 we get a good little sort of microcosm look at this sweeping plan of redemption in its fullness. Paul identifies himself as a bondservant of God. That's sort of generic identification which could encompass anybody who served God. We serve God, he served God. We're all bondservants of God. But in a very narrow sense his service rendered was as an Apostle of Jesus Christ and that privilege only belonged to the Twelve, and Judas disqualified and replaced by Mathias, and one more, Paul, so thirteen who were true Apostles. There were other apostles in the small "a" sense, messengers of the church, but Apostles of Jesus Christ, a very, very elite group of only thirteen people. So Paul says, "As a servant of God and as an Apostle of Jesus Christ this is what my ministry was...first of all, it was for the faith of the elect. It was for the faith of those chosen by God." My responsibility was to preach the gospel so that the elect could hear and believe. That's what I do. I preach the gospel so the elect can hear and believe the faith of those chosen of God. And then he says, "Further, my ministry was for the knowledge of the truth which is according to godliness." First of all, I preach the gospel so the elect can hear and believe, and then I teach the knowledge of the truth to those who believe so that they can become godly. So first of all, his was a ministry of regarding justification, and then it was a ministry of sanctification. And finally it had an emphasis on glorification, verse 2, "In the hope of eternal life." And that's the three stages of salvation. Salvation is justification, it is sanctification and it is finally glorification. Paul says that was my gospel ministry, to bring the message of salvation to the elect so they could believe. Once they believed to teach them the knowledge of the truth so they could be godly. And then to tell them of the life to come so they can live in the hope of eternal glory.

This whole plan, justification-sanctification-glorification, came, it says, from God, verse 2, "Which God who cannot lie promised..." when did He promise it? This last phrase, NAS says, "Long ages ago," it's not a good translation, the margin says, "Before times eternal." The best translation is "Before time began...before time began." Before time began God chose certain people. Before time began He chose that they would hear the truth and believe it, that they would then come to the knowledge of the truth and be sanctified and ultimately end into...end in eternal glory. God promised all of this before time began, before there was any creation at all, including the creation of angels. God made this plan and He chose certain people. Revelation tells us a couple of times their names

were written in the Lamb's Book of Life before the foundation of the world...before the world and the universe was ever created God chose who would be His own, who would be justified, sanctified, and glorified. And He made the promise of such accomplishment, that is the promise of their justification, sanctification, and glorification, all of it before time began. All who have ever come to faith or will ever come to faith in Christ, all who have ever been saved, all who have ever received the gift of salvation through the New Covenant ratified in the death of Jesus Christ had their names written down before they were ever created so that the church is a marvelous work of God planned before time began. That means you were chosen by God before you were ever created.

Turn over to 2 Timothy chapter 1 to see further into this. Second Timothy chapter 1 verse 9 says that God, mentioned at the end of verse 8, saved us...that's true...God called us with a holy calling, that is He saved us, that's justification, called us with a holy calling, that is He saved us unto sanctification, and ultimately the full holy calling, glorification. So it's the same plan. "He did this not according to our works." It was not based on us. Why? We didn't exist. Nothing existed but the trinity. "But according to His own purpose...to His own purpose and grace which was granted us in Christ Jesus," here's the exact same phrase. Again the NAS translated it differently than the one in Titus 1, but it's the same phrase, "Granted us in Christ Jesus before time began." Before time began God purposed to do this. Before time began He determined who He would save, who He would sanctify and who He would glorify. And He did it according to His own purpose and His own grace in Christ Jesus. This is the great doctrine of election.

To take it a little bit further, the Father has redeemed us in order to give His Son a bride. We are the bride. Ultimately all the redeemed in the end in the picture of Revelation end up in the bridal city of the New Jerusalem as the bride of the Redeemer Jesus Christ. Like a father in ancient times who went out to find his son a bride, God sought a bride for His Son, a bride who could serve His Son, who could radiate the glory of His Son, who would worship and honor and glorify His Son forever and ever and ever and ever. Why? As a testimony of God's grace. Ephesians 1:5, "He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself according to the kind intention of His will." It was all His will, His intention, His purpose. He predestined us. Why? "To the praise of the glory of His grace which He freely bestowed on us in the beloved one who is Christ."

God is a God of grace. God is a God of mercy. God is a God of compassion. How is He going to show that? How is God going to demonstrate grace? Well the only environment in which you could demonstrate grace is an environment in which there is a need for grace, right? There's no grace functioning in the trinity because they're all perfectly holy. There's no grace functioning among the holy angels because there's no need for grace, there's no mercy, there's no forgiveness, there's no compassion because there's nothing wrong with anything. And if God was going to demonstrate grace and He had every right to put His grace on display so that He could be forever praised for His grace because that was His attribute, is His attribute, God determined that in order to display His grace to angels and all the redeemed of all the ages and in order to receive the worthy praise that He should get because of His grace, He had to allow an environment in which grace could operate, and thus He allowed sin and sought out redemption. So to put His grace forever on display, God made a promise to the Son that He was going to give Him a bride. That's why in John 6 Jesus says, "All that the Father comes to Me I will receive...all that the Father gives to Me I will receive and I will keep and raise at the last day." Jesus sees every individual who is saved as a personal love gift from the Father to Him.

As I said last week, we have a corporate relationship with the Lord, but that is not distinct from at the

same time having a very personal relationship with the Lord. We are a love gift from the Father to the Son, the Son knows it. In John 17 four times, verse 9, I think 11, 12, 24 Jesus says, "Those that You have given Me.." You're a Christian because the Father gave you to the Son. You're a Christian because God determined that He would do that before there was ever any creation. And He determined to do that so that His grace could be on display. If there was no Fall, and no sin, and no redemption, there would be no opportunity for mercy, for grace, for compassion, and for forgiveness. Those are attributes of God which had ever right to be displayed and shall be displayed forever and you will be a part of that redeemed humanity, the bride of the Son who will forever praise and glorify God for His grace.

This is the plan. You can't even understand the church if you don't understand that. If you have a view of the church that doesn't include election, then you don't get it. You don't understand the church. If you are a believer you have been chosen by God to be a member of the bride, to be a part of the bride of His beloved Son. And even beyond that, you will be made like His Son. Romans 8 says we have been predestined, we have been chosen, we have been justified, we have been glorified in order that He might make us into the image of His Son. When we get to heaven not only are we going to praise the Son and the Father, but we're going to radiate and reflect the glory of the Son, we're going to be like Him for we see Him as He is. This is the great reality of redemption. So you're not sort of out there on your own, you're part of that redeemed community, that is the bride of the Son chosen by the Father. When you look at the church, that's what you have to see. This is not a human organization. This is not a collection of people who were smart enough to accept Jesus, or...as I hear people say...lucky enough, whatever in the world that is. This is an association of people chosen by God before the foundation of the world whose names are written down before there was ever any creation of anybody. And God had predetermined that we would be gathered together to be a bride for His Son and some day when human history has come to its end, we will be presented to the Son as the bride in the heavenly city, the New Jerusalem, the bridal city where we will enjoy His glory forever and ever. This is God's plan and no one comes to Me, Jesus said, except the Father draws him because the Father is sovereign in salvation.

Secondly, to understand the church you have to understand the doctrine of identification-identification. When you think about the church you have to not only understand that we are chosen by God the Father, but secondly, you have to understand that we are in Christ the Son. It goes so far as to say that the way you treat another believer is the way you treat Jesus Christ, right? Galatians 2:20 Paul says, "I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live yet not I but Christ lives in me." Paul says, "Your body is the temple of the Spirit." To the Romans he said, "You have the Spirit of Christ in you." To the Corinthians he said, "He that is joined to the Lord is one spirit, we are one with Christ, we are inseparable from Christ." I don't know how to even define myself, I am crucified with Christ nevertheless I live yet not I but Christ lives in me. I don't know where I end and Christ begins. And in Matthew 18, "How you treat me is how you treat Christ." There is an identification here. We are not only Christ's by ownership, we are Christ's by having received the divine nature. God takes up residence in us. The church is precious because of that.

We are precious, Acts 20:28 says, because we were purchased by His own blood, the high price for us was paid. First Corinthians 6:19, 20 says, "What? Know ye not that your body's a temple of God, the Spirit of God which you have of God? You're not your own, you're bought with a price, therefore glorify God in your body, your spirit which are God's." First Peter 1 says you've been redeemed not by corruptible things like silver and gold but the precious blood of the Lamb without blemish and spot. Jesus paid the supreme price, purchased you for God and then took up residence in you.

We are identified with Christ in every sense. We're identified in His death. That is to say He died in my place, therefore His dying on the cross was my death to sin. When God executed Jesus on the cross, He executed Him for my sins. So I was there in Christ in the sense that the penalty for my sin was fully paid. And then on the other side of that, Christ's perfect life is imputed to me. Second Corinthians 5:21, "He made Him who knew no sin to become sin on the cross that we might become the righteousness of God in Him." And I've said this so many times, on the cross God treats Jesus as if He lived my life, turns right around and treats me as if I lived His life. That's identification. You can't separate the believer from the Lord. It's impossible. How you treat me is how you treat Him because Christ and His own are one. There is a spiritual union there. There is an identification with Christ that Paul continually calls being in Christ...in Christ. That's all over the New Testament.

I've read a lot of things about religion, I've never read anything about being in Mohammed, or in Allah, or in Buddha, or in any other deity. But that is the essential distinction of Christianity. We are in Christ and Christ is in us. This is the great doctrine of identification. And so all of us who know Christ are in Christ, Christ is in us and in each of us, therein is the true identification of the church. It is not a matter of identifying with a denomination. It is not a matter of identifying with a ministry style. It is a matter of identification with Jesus Christ. And the church to be a true church must understand the doctrine of substitution. It must proclaim the doctrine of substitution, substitutionary atonement, substitutionary righteousness, that is He is the substitute for us bearing our sin on the cross and He substitutes His righteousness for our unrighteousness in covering us with the robe of virtue. The church is precious. The church is Christ. Remember what Jesus said in the..."In having done it unto the least of these My brethren, you've done it unto Me." Remember that? When did we serve You? When did we give You a cup of cold water? He said, "When you did it unto one of these who belong to Me, you did it to Me."

You have to understand what the church is. This is Christ, this is a collection of people in whom Christ lives. It's all about Him. You can't define the church as unbelievers, and you can't define the church as disconnected people. You can only define the church as one in Christ with each other because one with Him. Much more could be said about that. And the value of the church is not some intrinsic value in us, we don't have any value. We are the chief of sinners. We are spiritually bankrupt. We are the poor prisoners, blind and oppressed. We offer God nothing but an opportunity to display grace. Can I say it that way? That's the only value you have, or I have. The only value we have is we provide God an opportunity to display grace. That's it. That's it. And He wanted that opportunity to the degree that He was willing to send His Son to die in our place. The Father had the plan but the Son had to pay the price. You know, if you wanted to marry the daughter in the ancient times, the father might give you the permission, he might go find you a bride but then the price would have to be paid for her, right? The dowry? Well the price was paid for you, the sinless Son, the second member of the trinity, became incarnate, came into the world, endured all the things that He did at the hands of men. Ultimately He was hated, rejected, nailed to a cross, crucified like a common criminal and did all of that in order to bear your sin, to pay the purchase price for His bride. And so He gained His bride, drew His bride to Himself, became as in a marriage one. Like the analogy in marriage, those two become one flesh and we who are the bride of Christ have become one with Him. This is the identification of the church. You cannot separate the church from Christ. The true church is Christ. So when you talk to the church, when you minister in the church, Christ is the focal point of everything.

Thirdly, and more could be said about that, thirdly, the doctrine of purification. To understand the

church one must understand this matter of purification, that the objective of the church is not to be cool in the world, the objective of the church is not to adapt to the world, the objective of the church is not to be like the world, the objective of the church is not to create an environment which makes the world feel comfortable. The objective of the church is holiness-holiness, purification, separation from the world.

I'll give you an illustration of that. In the disciples' prayer in Matthew 6:9 to 10 there, Jesus says in the opening of the prayer, "Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name, Thy Kingdom come," and then He makes this statement, "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven...we've prayed that, we've prayed it, we've sung it, very familiar, but what does it mean? What are You saying? Lord, do Your will on earth just like it is in heaven. What is going on in heaven that needs to go on down here? What? What does that mean? Certainly God in the end will work His purpose in the world, we read that in Isaiah 44 and 46. What does it mean "Pray that what is going on in heaven...pray that God's will being done there would be done here?"

Well, it's simple to answer the question. You just start asking the right questions. What's going on in heaven? If you were to take a trip to heaven today, what would be going on there? What would you find?

I'll tell you exactly what you'd find because the Bible reveals it. Number one, you'd find God being worshiped, right? You'd find God being worshiped. You'd find the entire host of...of holy angels and all the redeemed of all the ages who are in the presence of God, all of them who are there in their...the church triumphant, the redeemed of Israel, not yet in their glorified bodies but still there around the throne worshiping God, you'd find all of them doing that one single thing. We know that because we get a glimpse of it in Revelation 4 and 5. And what are they all doing? They're all glorifying God...glorifying God...worshiping God...praising God. That's what goes on in heaven and that's exactly what God wants to go on in heaven. And what He wants to be going on in heaven is to the praise of His glory? No, to the glory of His grace. The angels can't praise Him for His grace, they can praise Him for His grace second-handedly because they can see it in those that are there from the human race who have been redeemed, but particularly redeemed sinners are in heaven praising and worshiping God, giving glory to Him for His grace. And that's what's going to go on forever. That's what goes on in heaven.

There's another thing going on in heaven. If you were to go there today you would also find Christ is being exalted. God is being worshiped, Christ is being exalted in a symphony of beauty, the likes of which you will never hear on this earth even though you'll hear many majestic pieces of music. The harmonies of heaven are going to be something the likes of which you can't even fathom. And as heaven harmonizes before the throne, there will be some of them worshiping God and others of them exalting Jesus Christ and switching back and forth in some inexplicable, eternal, glorious offering of praise. Christ will be being exalted. While some are exalting God and glorifying God, others will be exalting Christ and glorifying Him. That's what's going on in heaven. They'll be saying, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive glory and honor and power and riches and wisdom and strength," as Revelation outlines for us. That's what's going on in heaven.

Oh there's one other thing going on, a preoccupation with holiness. There are angels in the background in this heavenly symphony in perfect celestial harmony singing, "Holy, holy, holy, holy, holy, holy," that's heaven. And all of it without any cacophony, all of it without any interruption, all of it in perfect, glorious, eternal harmony. But that's what goes on.

Now when you pray this prayer, let happen on earth what's going on up there, what you're saying is we want down here God to be worshiped and Christ to be exalted and holiness to be the focus of our attention. Where's that going to happen? One place, right? The church. It can't happen anywhere else. So what should the church be? Like the world? No. Like heaven. When you walk in here you ought to be very aware that God is being worshiped, Christ is being exalted, and holiness is being elevated. That's what we do. The last thing you want is for an unbeliever to come in here and say, "This feels familiar." That would be a tragedy for an unbeliever to come in and say, "I feel comfortable here." What they ought to do is come in here and say, "I've never experienced anything like this in my entire existence, what is this?" Because there is a collective people worshipping God, exalting Jesus Christ and longing after holiness, longing to be more obedient, more faithful.

And that fleshes out in Matthew 18. If somebody in the congregation is in sin, go to them. If they don't listen, take two or three witnesses. If they still don't listen, tell the church. If they don't hear the church, throw them out. You have to discipline. You have to keep the church pure. The church has lost its interest in holiness. It's lost its interest in transcendence. As I said some months ago, preaching is neither deep or high. It doesn't go down into the great, rich depths of Scripture so it can't lift people to the heights of praise. It's in the flat in the middle. The church should be consumed with these things.

This is what the church is called to. It's called to purification. And when you worship God and when you exalt Jesus Christ, you will pursue holiness. If all you do is focus on men, you'll tolerate sin because what you're trying to do is make them happy, make them like you, make them comfortable, make yourself acceptable to them, win them over. And so sin is pushed back, confrontation of sin is pushed away. There's no real call for holiness to which they can't relate and by which they are offended. But the way it's done in heaven, holiness reigns supreme in an environment where God and Christ are worshiped and exalted. And this is what the church must do. That's why you have so much instruction in the New Testament to churches about purity. In 2 Corinthians Paul says, "Look, I'm going to come and what I'm afraid is I'm going to find that you have violated the purity of the church and I'm going to have to deal with you and I will deal with you," he says. Unity, sins attacking unity, sins attacking virtue, sins attacking truth, sins of heresy, these are the things that consumed the Apostle Paul as he endeavored to keep the church pure...pure.

There's a fourth doctrine that is essential to the church if you want to understand it. It's the doctrine of revelation. Grace Community Church is committed to the doctrine of election. We understand the church to be the Lord's church which God Himself chose, purchased by Christ. We are committed to identification, that believers are one with Christ and we have to treat each other the way we would treat Jesus Christ. This is a Christ-exalting church. We are also committed to the great truth of purification. We want a holy church. And all of that flows out of our commitment to the doctrine of revelation, number four.

What do I mean by that? That the Scripture reigns in the church. The Scripture reigns in the church. The central feature of a ministry has to be the Word of God. The Scripture is the pillar and ground...the church, I should say, is the pillar and ground of the truth, Peter wrote. If you come here, you're going to hear the truth of God. You're not going to hear my opinion, I'm not going to give you my opinion. You don't need my opinion. My opinion doesn't matter. I'm not in the opinion business. But whenever somebody stands up in this pulpit, you're going to hear what God has said verse by verse, chapter by chapter, book by book through His Word. The Bible says we are to preach the

Word constantly, faithfully, in season, out of season, when it's popular, when it's not. Sometimes it's negative, reproves and rebukes. Sometimes it's positive, exhorts, instructs. We are to preach with authority, Titus 2:15, and let nobody evade that authority. We are to give ourselves to the reading of Scripture and the explaining of Scripture. That's all we do. That's exactly the beginning and the end of ministry.

It's amazing to me how people today that we are so dependent on media when the Bible is so clear that preaching is the chief means God uses to deliver His message...preaching. He had only one Son and He was a preacher. And the Apostles were all preachers. And the New Testament missionaries were all preachers. And God has made preaching the chief means of dispensing the saving gospel and still is, it hasn't changed. That's why you don't come here and see a multi-media presentation. It's still preaching. It's the power of the Word of God poured through the life of the man of God. And in a world of lies, when you step in here you're going to hear the truth.

And I think that's what this church is known for. I'm glad this church is known as a place where you're going to hear the truth. And when we stand up in this pulpit, the Word of God is going to be opened and we're not going to give you our opinion. Jesus said to the Father in His high-priestly prayer, "Your Word is truth." And that's what has to be given to people...the truth.

I read the wackiest quote out of a book, the fastest selling book on church growth. The author said, "More people are won to Christ by feeling God's presence than by all of our apologetic arguments combined. Few people, if any, are converted to Christ on purely intellectual grounds. It is the sense of God's presence that melts the heart and explodes mental barriers," end quote. I don't even understand what that means. What are you talking about? What do you mean feeling God's presence, what's that? That's frightening. Few people are converted to Christ on purely intellectual grounds? Then few people are converted period cause you can't be converted if you don't understand the gospel. What are we trying to do, create a mood here with lighting and sound and schmooze people into some witless affirmation of something they don't understand?

Well really nothing has changed around here. Over 30 years ago people said if you try to build the church on teaching the Bible, you're not going to be able to do it. They don't say that anymore because through the years that's all we've ever done. You find a people who are taught the revelation of God, which is alive and powerful and sharper than any two-edged sword, that it does its mighty work in people's lives, and the longer you have been here the mightier that work is. We are committed to the truth of revelation. When the church meets, it listens to God speak.

Well, lastly, and I'm only going to refer to it because our time is gone, we are committed to the doctrine of restoration. What we mean by that is this, that there's coming a day when Jesus will return and bring the times of restoration...that's what they're called in the book of Acts, the times of refreshment, the times of restoration. That's the Kingdom. We believe that Jesus is coming to set up His Kingdom on earth, right? We believe that when He comes He is going to renovate the earth. The desert around Israel is going to blossom like a rose. He's going to split the Mount of Olives and a river is going to flow into that desert to irrigate it. We believe He's going to create that big valley, the Valley of Jehoshaphat, in which He'll judge the nations. We believe that there's going to be a reversal of the curse, the lion will lie down with the lamb. The prophet Isaiah said the children will play in a snake pit because there won't be anymore poisonous snakes. It will be like Eden again, paradise regained.

We believe that's where we're going in human history and that that lasts for a thousand years and then the Lord obliterates the entire universe and creates a new heaven and a new earth. And that's why we're not into environmentalism. As I've said so many times, if you think we're messing up the planet, wait till you see what Jesus does to it. He will obliterate it and probably not too long from now. And we're not in to changing the political structure either. It's like rearranging the deck chairs on the Titanic, it's going down, it really doesn't matter where the chairs are. We're not involved in that. We have a view to the return of Christ. We have a view to the restoration of all things in Christ. There is somebody who is going to come along and who is going to fix the planet for a season of a thousand years. He's going to make it into an Eden for a thousand years and that's the Lord Jesus Christ, and then there will be perfect environment, as perfect as it can be. And there will be perfect rule of a perfect ruler and there will be a perfect control of society. He will rule with a rod of iron and there will be perfect singular worship, the only worship allowed on the face of the earth will be the worship of the true living God and His Son Jesus Christ. And there will be that thousand-year Kingdom of perfection that is promised by the prophets of the Old Testament and the writers of the New and is laid out for us all the way from Daniel through...well, all the way from Isaiah through to the book of Revelation. That's what's coming in the future. So we believe in restoration and we live in this world only holding very lightly to what is a disposable planet. Its great flourishing day is yet to come for a brief thousand years and then it will be replaced by the new heaven and the new earth. God will then finally have gathered His entire bride and take them into the glory of the eternal state. That's church...from election to final glorification. It moves through the great realities of election and identification as it comes to Christ who is the substitute through purification. This is the...this is the process that is unfolding, all of it dependent on revelation and ending up in the great glorious restoration and then the final new heaven and new earth.

That's what defines our church. It's always been that way, it's never been any different from that. And that's what the New Testament says is the theology of the church. That's what we're committed to. And I trust that some of you who have just sort of sat on the edges will make a real commitment to our church as well. If you want to do that this morning, you can go to that table in the patio, there's a little card there and a packet like this, pick it up, it explains about membership in our church. We're not trying to build our numbers, we're just trying to get you to do what's right and belong as you should belong in the purest sense to the church that's obedient to the Word of God. If not here, somewhere else where they're faithful to the Scripture. Join me in prayer.

Father, as we leave now, we pray that You will lead many to the tables to pick up an application and to prayerfully and thoughtfully read over it, that You would draw into this fellowship intimately, bring alongside those who can serve with us, that You would bring us under the shepherding and the rule of the elders and pastors here. Work in each life, Father, we pray for Your glory. Amen.

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