

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

Marks of a Faithful Church

Scripture: Selected Scriptures

Code: 80-289

Yes it is Reformation Sunday. And if you did the math 1517 is 487 years ago. We think in America we invented everything. We did not rescue the truth from the Roman Catholic Church. Actually it was a German and a Frenchman that led that parade, Martin Luther and John Calvin.

And kind of fun today, I have a little grandson, a two-year-old grandson, whose name is Calvin. And today he was playing with another little two-year-old whose name was Luther. So Luther and Calvin are still with us in miniature form. Who knows what great revolution they are leading in the nursery week in and week out? Well it just goes to show you how those names are important, doesn't it, when they're still being used for another generation of little ones.

I have spent the last week, I suppose even a number of hours reading a Bible, not that I don't normally do that, I do. But the Bible that I've been reading is a very special Bible. It was - well actually it was published originally in 1535, 18 years after Luther pinned his thesis at Wittenberg. It is the product of a man named William Tindale who was burned at the stake by Bloody Mary for translating the Bible out of Greek and Hebrew into the language of the people. That was a great crime because it was gonna spell the demise of the Roman Catholic system if people could read the Bible they would know they weren't being told the truth. And so there was a lot at stake. William Tindale did as much as he could, he did the New Testament. And when he was martyred one of his disciples, a man whose name was John Rogers, actually he went under another name as a publisher to try and be under the radar a little bit, he finished the work. And the Tindale Bible was originally produced in 1535. There were a number of copies of it in those years, for the next 15 years or so. Bloody Mary collected most of them and burned them. Tragic loss. When you stop to think about the fact that when Bibles were published at that time the letters were carved out of wood, they were put in a metal rack one letter at a time, a piece of paper was put on it and it was inked and then the paper was rolled. And that's what you did, one page at a time. Really a laborious effort to get the Word of God to the hands of the people.

It's pretty interesting to understand this back in 1535 and the years following but what is really fascinating is that I've been reading this week one of those Bibles. That's right, it has a wooden cover, bound in leather and it's from that era and it's got Tindale's notes in the front. And he believed exactly the way we believe. There's a whole section on the fact that salvation is a work of God, a gift of God, a grace gift, in fact every believer is a gift from the Father to the Son and no one can come unless the Father gives him to the Son. It's just sound theology and there's just page after page after

page after page of these what they call Principle Matters of Scripture.

It was really Wickliffe in 1382 who translated the Bible into English, that's the first English Bible out of the Latin and that sort of started everything. Then it was Tindale who went back to the original Greek and Hebrew. You might be interested to know that the Master Seminary Library is starting a collection of these. We actually have a copy of the 1382 Wickliffe out of Latin. We have a Coverdale Bible, another one that comes from 1539 or something; I can't remember the exact year. Now we have on loan this Tindale Bible which is an incredible experience to hold in my hand wondering who else held this in their hand through the centuries. We also have a number of copies of the Geneva Bible which I have the first Bible ever published in Scotland in 1576. I have a copy of the 1599 Geneva Bible with the Book of Common Prayer in front and the Salterin the back, the hymn book, so they had every thing in one volume. And by then it had come down to a smaller size so an individual could have it and the Bible really began to get into the hands of the people when they were able to print it in a smaller form.

All of that to simply say that the Reformation came because the Bible came. Because the people got the Word in a language they could understand. And that is where the Great Reformation found its power. It was the power of the Word of God. And all those reformers were basically Bible expositors who explained the meaning of Scripture to people who had been in the dark through the whole of the Dark Ages up until about 1500. So this is a really notable day. One pastor I told you about some years ago said the Reformation was overrated. And that is an absolutely absurd comment. You cannot overrate the delivery of biblical truth to the world; to the German speaking world, to the French speaking world, to the English speaking world as well.

The Geneva Bible that came out of Geneva under the leadership of Calvin and Knox and some others was translated into those various languages. It's really that that has given us our heritage of the Christian faith so it is something to think back and to remember as an absolutely critical milestone in the work of the spirit and the world.

Well that aside, I wanna talk to you a little bit tonight because it's Church Light Sunday just about the history of our church. And I admit when I came here the primary reason that they brought me in as pastor was they had two pastors before me, both of them had died while they were pasturing and the church was supporting two widows. And they said can we get a young one. We've had two deaths; that's really hard on a church when the pastor dies, you get another pastor and he dies. And so I qualified; I was young and that was about the extent of it. And I had spoken at a number of camps to the young people of this church and we had a great time. I was a youth speaker in those days. If you heard me give one of those sermons you wouldn't even recognize me. It was sort of a cross between modest effort at Bible teaching and a modest effort at stand up comedy because that's kind of what you did with junior highers and high schoolers in those days. But anyway, we had a great time at camp and the kids came back from camp and they said to the leaders of the church, "We want John

McArthur to be our pastor." Well, that was a stretch in my twenties. But as it turned out the Lord worked and here I came to this church in February of 1969.

I realized that what was before me was what I wanted to do, what I waited to do, it's what I prayed to do. I'd already been out of seminary a few years. I was ready. I was chomping at the bit. I wanted to teach the Word of God. I wanted to get going but I realized the urgency of what I was being given to do. I was sure of one thing that the church belonged to Jesus Christ, that He was the Lord of the church, the head of the church, the shepherd of the church and that I was a steward of that. I had been very aware of 1 Corinthians 4 which says, "Let a man so account of us as of stewards of the mysteries of Christ." And I realized that I was given a stewardship. In other words this belonged to somebody else, namely Christ, and He had put it in my hands to manage it for Him. I was a steward of what I didn't own. And I knew that Christ was the chief shepherd and I knew that He was the head of His church and I knew that He had a will and a plan for His church and I knew that I didn't need to be in the dark about it because whatever it is that He wanted for His church it was clear to me He would put in the Scriptures or He couldn't hold His church accountable for it. Right? And I also knew that I had to give an account to Him for my ministry. That I had to stand before Him and give an account. And so what I wanted to do was find out what it is that Christ desired for His church and what was the real heart and soul of the stewardship that I had been given.

In those early years I was traveling in Washington, DC for whatever it was and I ran into a pastor there who said he finally understood how to lead the church because he had read a book on corporations in America by a guy named Peters and it unlocked everything. It really stunned me. I remember sitting in a rocking chair in his living room while he told me this. And I said you mean to tell me this non-Christian writing about corporate America discovered the key to the church and it's not in the Bible? I found that incredulous.

Early on I knew that it was in the Bible that we would find the pattern for the church. And it's still in the Bible and nothing has changed in these 35 years. The Bible is the same Bible. Oh we do things differently, culture changes, style changes, the form changes a little bit here and there, the kind of way we do things I hope we're better now than we were a few years ago, the vision is larger, the extent is greater. But the basics really can't change. And so I thought, as I mentioned this morning, that I would go back and I dug down into my file and found some really old notes that I had put together many, many years ago. I don't even remember when. And I decided that I would just take a look at them the first time in a long time, many years, because they were the foundation that I felt was the biblical foundation for the life of the church and this is the way we've always done it.

I know some of you have just discovered Grace Church lately but the foundations run deep. They really do. The facilities aren't old but the foundations are very deep. I was just in Canterbury, England and I went to the Canterbury Cathedral and of course that thing was started well over a thousand years ago, I think in the sixth century. That's an old building but I regret to say it has a very

new theology. We're a relatively new building but we have a very old theology.

We have a very old ecclesiology, that's the doctrine of the church. And so I put some things down and I just want to walk you through these things a little bit tonight in sort of an informal way. Just to let you know why the church is what it is. and we sort of refined our understanding of these things and refined and shaped as time went on the way we carry out these things but pretty much it's these things that continue to be the essence of the life at this church.

Let me jump right in. Here are, how many did I write down? Well I wrote down 12 but I'm entitled to edit as I go. The first thing that I knew was a mark of a faithful church, the first thing I knew that I had to do in this church to discharge my stewardship, the first thing I knew Christ wanted in his church was that His church be committed to the absolute authority of Scripture. The absolute authority of Scripture. And I use the word absolute in the sense that you would understand it that it is the only authority in the church. I have no authority on my own as pastor. The pastors collectively have no authority. There is no such thing as ecclesiastical authority. There's no such thing as elder authority or pastor authority or denominational authority. There's really only one kind of authority in the church and that's biblical authority. And the Bible has absolute authority over the church, absolute authority.

To say it another way, the Bible dominates the church. Because it is the only place we can go to get the mind of Christ. When I was in London just a couple of Sundays ago I went to the Scottish Presbyterian Church, you know my heritage is Scottish. And so I thought well I'll check out the Scottish Presbyterian Church which was around the corner from the place we were staying. And I went in there on the Lord's Day with Patricia and Cory and Melinda were with us and so we went into the back of this very beautiful church and their claim to fame is that the Queen has worshipped there, et cetera, et cetera. And it was very interesting, I just wanted to kind of check in and see how things went. First thing that happened is somebody got up in front in a whole lot of robes and things and said, "Please rise," and everybody stood up. And in from the back down the middle aisle came a man holding the Word of God up about eye level. Walking all the way down the middle aisle. And I looked down at the little program and it said, "Rise for the entrance of the Word of God." And everybody stood. And down the middle aisle they came with this big Bible and placed it on the pulpit. And then there was a sort of traditional praise hymn that was sung that exalted God and His truth and then the service went on. And at the very end we were told again, "Please rise," and everybody stood up again and the same person, in the same sort of declaration picked up the Bible and held it up where it would be at eye level for everybody and walked right back down the middle aisle. And even during the service the Bible was read. The Old Testament was read. The Gospels were read and a portion of the Apostles were read and they read three sections every Lord's Day.

I couldn't really discern any other real commitment to the truth of the Bible but a very traditional affirmation of its authority over the church. Not sure how it played out in the actual service since the main emphasis of the service was to collect socks for the homeless which isn't bad in itself. There

was no real effort at explaining the truth of Scripture. But I thought to myself you know they had it right long ago and the tradition still stands, they understand the reigning authority in the church is the Scripture. It is the Scripture. All rise as the Word of God is brought in.

We are begotten again by the word of truth, Peter says. We are sanctified by the truth, Jesus said. Paul put it this way, you cannot be saved, you can't be redeemed without faith and faith comes by hearing the Word of Christ. The church says that Paul to Timothy is the pillar and ground of the truth. Anytime anybody walks into a church they should hear the Word of God. That's why pastors are told to preach the Word in season and out of season. We are told to study to be approved of God workmen needing not to be ashamed, to recognize that it is inspired, that it isn't by private interpretation or origin that it came but holy men of God who were moved by the Holy Spirit to write it down. It is inerrant, it is infallible, it is authoritative. And the apostle Paul, thankful for the way the Thessalonians responded to the Word of God, sums it up with these words, 1 Thessalonians 2:13, "For this reason we constantly thank God that when you received from us the Word of God's message you accepted it not as the word of men but for what it really is, the Word of God." And so the absolute authority of Scripture must reign in the church.

The priority then is on preaching and teaching. The priority is on the study of Scripture at all levels. And so we determined in those early years that we would every time that we entered into this pulpit preach the Word of God. And as I've said before the meaning of the Scripture is the Scripture. I hope you understand that statement. You can have a Bible, you can read a Bible but if you don't understand it you don't have God's message. It's the meaning that is the message and so you have to interpret, rightly divide it, cut it straight which of course takes time and effort and preparation. From the very beginning we determined that every time you come in this place we will open the Word of God. That even beyond this, whether it's in a Sunday school class, a fellowship group, a home group or wherever it is the Word of God is going to be the absolute priority.

Then the seminary came along in 1986 and if you walk in there today you will see a sign on the wall, if you haven't do it, you'll see a sign on the wall at the top of the stairs "Preach the Word". There isn't anything else to preach. And if you go into the seminary board room and walk around the wall you'll see a page from every edition of the English Bible going back to the Reformation. We have a page from those ancient texts just to remind people that we're connected to an ancient book; the same beloved book that brought the Reformation. And if you walk down the halls of the seminary building you're gonna see other pages. We have a page from every edition of the Bible published in America. And if you go down to the archive room in the library you're going to find these ancient texts that are being collected there. And if you go into the library itself you're gonna find what now people are saying, and we're glad for this, is the finest theological library here and maybe the second finest in the West. And it's all helping us to train men to understand the Word of God and it's available to you.

We knew that if Christ was gonna rule in this church he rules through His Word. That hasn't changed. And that's kind of what set Grace Church apart. I know this, and I'll give you a quick list, hold on, when you teach the Scripture you establish the authority of God over men. When you teach the Scripture you honor the lordship of Christ over His church. When you teach the Scripture you provide the necessary element in the word of the Spirit for the spirit sanctifies through the Word. When you preach the Word of God you produce humility and submission. When you preach the Word of God you model the priority of Bible interpretation and study which is essential to every individual. When you preach and teach the Word of God you develop depth and transcendence so critical to worship. When you preach the Word of God you enable people to develop the mind of Christ, to understand how Christ thinks on all issues. When you preach the Word of God and teach the Word of God you protect the believer from error and shallowness so dangerous to spiritual growth. When you preach and teach the Word of God you equip Christians with the ability to defend threatening truths and they become soldiers in the battle for the truth. When you preach and teach the Word of God you equip Christians to fulfill their calling to live and proclaim the truth with conviction and compassion. You can't have convictions if you don't really understand the truth. Ultimately then when you preach the Word of God you accomplish the great commission because believers are equipped for evangelism.

Now there's a second in my little list here we'll work our way through. That was an important one; took a little more time with it. That's so foundational. It's absolutely unbelievable to me that churches attempt to carry on their ministry without careful, systematic, week in, week out explanation of the mind of God revealed in Scripture but they do. The second thing is this, I was convinced that we had to put a high priority on worship. A high priority on worship because what Scripture does is lead us to God. Scripture introduces us to God in His fullness, God the Father, God the Son, God the Spirit. And the dominating experience - if the dominating expression of the church is the Word of God the dominating experience of the church is worship. It is to come to love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength. In order to do that you gotta understand how glorious He is, how great He is. The more I know about the Word of God the greater God is in my eyes; the greater He is the more prone I am to worship Him.

And I hinted at this a minute ago, I have two responsibilities to you. One is to take you down and the other is to take you up. Down means to take you down into the text of Scripture so that you know the mind of God and the mind of Christ. You know the truth. And when you go down deep into the truths that God has revealed concerning Himself the response is to go up in worship. If you never go down you can only be manipulated emotionally in worship because worship, true, pure worship from the heart is not in response to the tune, it's not in the response to the director or the manipulation or whatever. True worship flows up from the depth of understanding of the glory and the wonder of your God.

So I knew that we had to put a high priority on worship. Worship needed to be the dominating experience. The Bible says in John 4 that the Father seeks true worshipers. God is worthy to be

worshipped. He wants to be worshipped so we determine from the very beginning what it says in Revelation 22:9, "Worship God." Worship God. Paul, in Philippians 3 says, "We are those who worship Christ Jesus." In order to do that you have to have a high view of God. You have to have an exalted view of Christ. You have to have an exalted view of the Holy Spirit. And Scripture gives us all of that. If you're gonna worship in spirit, that means with your emotion, with the fullness of your human capability, you must also worship in truth. All that spirit, all that expression of joy, all that praise that comes from your lips must be informed by the truth in your mind. He wants to be worshipped in spirit and in truth.

And so in our study of Scripture we had to apply ourselves to the deepest, widest understanding of our God, our Christ and the blessed Holy Spirit. In fact that's what the Bible does. It's got self revelation. There is truth in there about man and there's truth in there about angels and there's truth in there about devils and Satan and there's truth in there about the unregenerate but the dominate message of the Bible is this God revealing Himself in all His fullness and how it is that sinners can be reconciled to Him forever.

When we come together then it is to worship. We're drawing near to Him. We're lifting our hearts in praise and worship. We come Hebrew 10 says, drawing near to God, coming with clean hearts drawing, it says, with a sincere heart and full assurance of faith having our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience, our body washed as it were with pure water. The picture here is of coming into God's presence, ascending the holy hill with clean hands and a pure heart to worship.

And I know the tendency when you come to church is well what did you think? I don't know he's an okay guy that guy who spoke. Maybe it's a six on a one to ten. You're not here to evaluate the preacher. That's not the idea. You're not really the audience. I'm not offering, in a sense, my sermon to you. My sermon is a sacrifice offered to God. I want Him to be pleased and your response is a sacrifice to God. God is the audience. The preacher is not a performer and you're the audience. We are all collectively worshippers and God is listening and watching our worship. It can not be superficial. It can not be ill-informed. To say nothing of some modern day expressions of worship that are totally out of control like in the Corinthian church where everybody is doing his own thing in absolute chaos and Paul tries to bring some order to all of that in 1 Corinthians.

But it's critical that we worship and to worship you have to have thoughts about God that continue to be enriched, thoughts about Christ that continue to be enriched, thoughts about the Spirit that continue to be enriched and inform that so your worship is in spirit, that is with all the fullness of your joy and expression of your affection but with the truth as a foundation. And maintaining that balance is a challenge. There are people you know who have all the truth and they're as cold as a dead fish. And there are people who have very little of the truth and they're fired in all directions in emotional expression. But the balance is that I worship God with all my faculties, with all my might, with all my affection because I understand the truth.

There is a third thing that I was determined would be at the foundation and I'm just going right down the list from all these years ago. The third thing was doctrinal clarity. You know sometimes people say to me, it's kind of common they'll say to me you know what you said was very clear. Clear is good, don't you think? All you say I hear preachers they're very hard to understand. Well that's easy; it's easy to be hard to understand. They say what do you mean. Well all you have to do to be hard to understand is not know what you're talking about. If you don't know what you're talking about believe me nobody else will either. Sometimes you hear somebody say it was too deep for me. No. That wasn't too deep for you. It was unclear and it may be unclear to you because it was equally unclear to him. It's very hard to be clear. And sometimes people will say that was so basic and so simple and so clear and you don't understand the effort that it takes to get to that clarity. But clear is not just good; it's necessary.

I mean there are a lot of people who will stand up and talk kind of God-talk, spiritual talk and when it's all done you're scratching your head saying wow, I don't know what that was about but it felt kind of good. Wasn't definitive, it wasn't very clear. And so from the very beginning I was convinced that God's truth was not some kind of mush that people sort of wallowed in and felt a little better but that there absolutely clear principles that needed to be drawn out of the text. And people need to understand those because those then become the threads that make the fabric of their convictions. It's really hard to build your life on something you're not clear about. So taking the text, studying the text, drawing out of the text clear principles, doctrines. It's not enough to know Bible stories. It's not enough to hear sort of spiritual talk. There is a body of content that must be understood.

There are so many Scriptures that deal with this and I'm just touching lightly on it but Roman 6 is a very interesting verse in the 17th verse of Roman 6. A very interesting verse because it points to this very issue. Now, Paul is writing to the Romans and he's very grateful to God for their salvation and in Romans 6:17 "Thanks be to God that, though you were slaves of sin, you became obedient from the heart," listen to this, "to that form of teaching, to that scheme of doctrine to which you were committed." The only way you can ever be rescued from lies, the only way you can ever be delivered from your slavery to sin is to become obedient to that scheme of doctrine. It's not enough to say well I love Jesus and you love Jesus and we all love Jesus and we're all going to Heaven. Those kind of vagaries, those kind of ambiguities aren't helpful. That's why from the very start I wanted to make sure we were clear on the gospel, clear on repentance, clear on the atoning work of Christ, clear on those matters related to salvation, clear on the Trinity, clear on the deity of Christ and all the other truths of Scripture. Doctrinal clarity was critical.

And I remember years ago doing a series on Ephesians 6 on the Sword of the Spirit, remember the Sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God? And you say well boy I've got the Sword. I own a Bible. You can own a million Bibles and not have the sword. It's not having a Bible that equips you to fight the spiritual war. You can't fight it with the Bible. You have to fight it with the theology that's in it.

Do you understand that? having the sword is not a matter of owning a Bible; it's a matter of knowing the content of it so that whatever comes your way, whatever temptation, whatever attack, whatever issue comes your way you can go directly to the Word of God and you can say this is the mind of Christ, this is the truth and with that you are armed. And so I knew that we had to have doctrinal clarity.

Paul instructs Timothy that way, he instructs Titus, telling Titus how very important it is that there be leaders in the church who hold fast the faithful word, wishes and accordance with the doctrine so that they can exhort in sound doctrine and refute those who contradict. And he says to Titus in chapter two, verse one "Speak the things fitting for sound doctrine." You have to know what you believe. You have to understand the principles of Scripture. It can't just be a spiritual fog. I knew that. I still know that. and so the first thing I did when I got here to Grace Church was I started a class on Saturday morning and I said if we're gonna have any leadership here these people are gonna have to know doctrine. I can't teach everybody so I've gotta get some men around me who are gonna learn doctrine. So I got a group of men together, I picked some and I invited some and I through it open to everybody. I think we had about 30 or 35 men in those early years and I met with them every Saturday morning for several hours and I just started with the doctrine theology proper, the very doctrine of God. Then we went to the doctrine of Scripture. Then we went all the way through the doctrines of the Bible and we were involved in that for about seven years. And they came to understand the great truths of Scripture. And they are within our grasp.

You look at the Bible, you say 66 books, all of that stuff in there, how can you ever get it all. There are only a certain number of truths and they're repeated in different contexts and different experiences and different illustrations and different analogies and different events. And when you understand those truths you keep running into them everywhere. And it's how the Bible presents itself as a many faceted diamond so that you can look at these great truths from various perspectives. But there are only so many of them. And we began to understand that and after those seven years we had a core of men who were clear on doctrine. And that is why through all the years of this church there has been a clarity here about the doctrine of Scripture. The doctrines of the Scripture are clear to us that we could well be called a doctrinal church because we don't just tell the Bible stories and talk about spiritual things; we define the meaning of the Scripture in terms of principles. Doctrinal clarity absolutely critical because that's the fabric of your life. \

Listen folks, you live your theology. That's what I saying on the television the other day. You can't tell Christians, this guy wanted to argue about the separation of church and state, you can't - the true church, true Christians, you can't tell them not to vote their convictions. That's who they are. Then I heard John Kerry say just a couple of days ago, "I'm not gonna let my religious beliefs affect my politics." That's ridiculous. He is his religious beliefs. He is. What you see what he believes. And so is everybody else. You can't separate me from my convictions. The issue is my convictions need to be clear and they need to be based on the Word of God. I knew that in the early years and I guess

God gave me a father who pounded that into me and God gave me mentors in my seminary who drilled it into me. That was one of those pillars, doctrinal clarity. And it continues to be even now. Sunday nights we're going through these doctrines to make them clearer.

Four, spiritual discernment. Spiritual discernment. People have asked me through the years what is the biggest problem in the church and the answer to that is they don't understand the authority of Scripture; they don't have doctrinal clarity so they aren't discerning. Boy, I'm telling you I have seen this through all the years the lack of discernment. Look at 1 Thessalonians 5, there are a lot of Scripture again on this issue but 1 Thessalonians 5 as Paul wraps up this letter he says this, verse 20, "Do not despise preaching." Prophetic utterances don't mean telling the future. Propheme, prophetic, prophecy means to speak before. That's preaching. That has sometimes a future aspect but it refers to any kind of proclamation. Don't despise prophetic utterances. Don't despise those who teach, who speak but, verse 21, "but examine everything carefully." How are you gonna do that? I mean we're drowning in heresy in this country aren't we. I mean we're overexposed to this and as I told you years ago about the man I met in Arkansas that said, "There's good in all of it." So that is sort of the mentality. It's oblivious to any doctrinal clarity, oblivious to any absolute authority of Scripture, it doesn't examine anything. Examine it carefully he says, hold on to what is good and get away from what is not.

Spiritual discernment is absolutely critical. You cannot spend your whole Christian life in Ephesians 4:14, "being a child tossed to and fro and carried about by every wind of doctrine." It's a terrible way to live. It's not necessary. We need to be like the noble Bereans Act 17:11 who search the Scripture daily to see if these things were what? Were true. And I expect you to do that even with me. I don't expect to ride across the top of this church impervious to the test of Scripture.

In 2 Timothy 1:13 Paul says to Timothy retain the standard of sound words. Guard through the Holy Spirit that dwells within us the treasure which has been entrusted to you. You have been given a treasure, the treasure is the Scripture, guard it, hold on to sound doctrine because it gives you discernment. And discernment is critical.

Listen to what Paul said to the Thessalonians in 2 Thessalonians 2. he says, "We request you brethren with regard to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and are gathering together to him," talking a little bit about the rapture, "that you may not be quickly shaken from your composure," listen to this, "or be disturbed either by a spirit or a message or a letter as if from us." Wow. Here's the Thessalonian church and somebody is sending them letters signed Paul but they're forgeries. And there's behind this an evil demonic spirit. And verse 3 says, "Let no one in any way deceive you." How are you gonna protect yourself? How in the world does a church protect itself from heresy? How does it protect itself from deception? Discernment. Discernment.

And so from the very beginning I knew there would be a note of warning in our ministry. That there were be a Paulinamic tone to our ministry that I needed to make you sharp in your ability to discern. I needed to equip you to sort out the minefield of theology that you're gonna be exposed to. Warning, like the apostle Paul told the Corinthians, to present you as a chaste version to Christ and not have you led astray like Eve was led astray. I knew there would be a warning tone in this ministry. Paul said to the Ephesian' elders, "I have not ceased to warn you night and day for three years." Wow. There has to be a warning tone because there is so much danger out there. And so from the very beginning we've been willing to draw lines. We've been willing to say this is true and this is not. And we're gonna stand on that truth and it may not be popular and it may make people think we are narrow and belligerent; we wanna be loving and gracious and kind and patient and tender hearted and compassionate but we don't move when it comes to the discerning things of the truth.

There's a fifth in my little list. Personal holiness. I mean I think that's kind of obvious but I think that it may escape some. I was convinced that the Lord wanted His church holy. That's just so obvious. I mean the holy Lord wants a holy people, right. All you have to do is read the Old Testament and see how God feels about an unholy people. Just look at the history of Israel and see what God does to a disaffected, disobedient, unholy people. The Lord Jesus wants a pure bride, a chaste bride. He wants us to be pure; He wants us to be clean. 1 Peter 1 Peter says that God has given us new life, living hope, an eternal inheritance, just incredible blessings. He's given us a salvation of our souls which is the outcome of our faith and so he says in verse 14, "As obedient children do not be conformed to the former less which was yours and your ignorance but like the holy one that called you be holy yourselves in all of your behavior because it is written." In fact it is written dozens of times in the book of Leviticus, "You shall be holy for I am holy." It's about holiness.

The Lord wants us to be a pure and holy people that's why in Peter is says in chapter 4:17, "Judgment begins with the household of God." That's right. Judgment begins with the household of God. Listen, the Lord is disciplining His church. Revelations 1 says He's moving in His church and the image there His eyes are like lasers penetrating to see the reality of what's going on in His church. And His feet are like blazing, burnished bronzed or brass as He goes through His church inflicting whatever chastening He needs on those that sin. Personal holiness is critical.

I'm not talking about false piety. Nothing is more noxious to God than false spirituality, superficiality. I'm not talking about legalism. I'm not talking about external kind of things. I'm talking about the heart. Isaiah 66, "To whom does the Lord look and whom does He seek? He who has contrite spirit and trembles at My Word." He wants humility; he wants virtue in His church. And so from the very beginning we knew we were gonna have to call people to a high standard of holiness, live at that high standard of holiness, set an example at that high standard of holiness and that we were gonna have to be willing to discipline in the Matthew 18 fashion. If somebody sins we go to that person, we follow it up with two or three if they don't repent and we follow it up by telling the whole church. And we follow that up by putting them out if they don't repent.

By the way, I was reading this afternoon in Tindale's Bible his little view of church discipline and he saw the way we see it because it's in the Bible. He said people must be excommunicated and rejected from the church if they will not abandon their sin. It's not hard to understand, is it? I remember when we first got going at Grace. I told a couple of older pastors I was gonna do that. They said oh my, you'll empty that church. People go you can't do that. I never heard of any church doing that. I said I really don't have a choice. Church doesn't belong to me. I have a stewardship before the Lord and this is what it says to do so this is what we'll do. What other choice do we have? Because the Lord wants a pure church and guess what it didn't empty the church. You're here all these years later. Why? Because God's true people seek a place where they're assisted in their pursuit of holiness.

There's a sixth in my little list. This too is an absolutely critical element of the church: the plurality of Godly leaders, a plurality of Godly leaders. Everywhere the word elder is used in the New Testament it's in the plural unless it's referring to the elder John identifying a single person. Every other time it's elders, elders, elders, elders and they're the same as pastors or presbyters they just look at a different - look at a different element of it. Elder means a mature person. Pastor means the shepherd or overseer. Bishop means, it's apostrophe, it's the function of leadership. But it's all referring to the same person and it was always the plurality. Ordained elders in every city. Paul went here and Paul went there ordaining elders. And so I knew from the very outset what the church was - how the church was to be organized; Christ is the head of the church. He mediates His rule in the church through His Word. His will is expressed in His Word. So if the people are gonna know His will as the Lord of the church there has to be a group of people who have the responsibility to teach His Word and to apply it, not just in the public services like I do but from house to house. Paul said he taught the Word from house to house as well as on the Lord's Day in a single place.

The Word of God must prevail and it must be carried to the people by gifted men. They're called elders or bishops or overseers or pastors in the New Testament and they are defined for us as to their qualifications in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1:5-10. There's really only one skill listed there. Talks about their above reproach life, blameless life, their families' in control, they have believing children, they have obedient children, they're temperate, moderate, they don't linger long beside alcoholic beverages and it goes through a list of things. But there's only one skill; they are to be dedocticosin the Greek, skilled in teaching. Cause that's the way you disseminate the will of the church to the church.

So the leaders of the church are not the guys who have the most clout in the community. They are not the movers and the shakers. They are not the presidents of corporations and the professionals of the church. That's not the criteria. That's not how you pick church leaders. That's how churches get in a lot of trouble. That's just not the way to do it. What you want is the people who are the skilled teachers whose teaching will be backed up by model spiritual life. That's it. That was easy enough.

So when I came here there were all kinds of boards and all kinds of ruling bodies and we just said well the Bible only gives one so we're gonna get to that point. And then we have deacons; I don't know, I think we have about 400 deacons and those are servants in the church and they just serve all over the place. And that's what the New Testament says. Not really too tough. Christ is the head of His church. He mediates His rule in His church through His Word and therefore if His people are gonna know what He wants to do they've got to have somebody who teaches them the meaning of the Word. And those who are elders are worthy of double honor, those who labor hard in the Word and doctrine. So some of them were gonna labor very hard in the Word and doctrine and give their whole life opt the Word and doctrine. They were worthy of double honor; that means double pay so we gotta take care of them, meet their needs because whoever preaches the gospel should live of the gospel.

1 Corinthians 9. And I wasn't just doing that for myself but to bring around a lot of other who could do that. I remember when I first started I pulled about four or five guys around me and I started to pour my life into them to equip them becuase I saw that they had the giftedness and the heart and the desire to end up in pastoral ministry. And we've been doing that for years and years and years. They've been flowing out of this church into ministry around the world and they're doing it now at a clip that is beyond anything any of us ever dreamed. But 375 men in the seminary. But the church everywhere in the world needs the plurality God and leaders and we knew that at the very outset. We weren't trying to raise up the clever. We were trying to raise up the Godly and the gifted.

Paul says to Timothy, "The things you've heard from me, the same commit to," listen to this, "faithful men who shall be able to teach others also." So if you're gonna invest your life invest in the faithful and the able and not the unfaithful and the unable. Because that's how you multiply leadership. Plurality of Godly leaders.

Let me give you another one. And I don't know if I'll get to 12. I'm mixing a few here. Discipleship: strong commitment to discipleship. And this was what I was talking about this morning. When we talk about discipleship I don't know what you think when you think of discipleship, maybe you took a discipleship class one time or maybe you think that's sort of a one on one deal and that's what it always is. What I mean about discipleship is nothing more than training believers to maturity. And the way I view discipleship is you use all the means you have at your disposal: teaching of the Word of God, prayer, personal contact. In fact, discipleship is really a spiritual friendship. It's a friendship where you lay your life on somebody spiritual and you give them direction and you fulfill all those on anothers. I knew that the Bible said that they would know us by our love. I knew that we were to mutually minister as I was pointing out this morning that we were gifted to minister to the body, that we were responsible to minister to the body, that we were to love each other with an ektonateto stretch love to a Greek word Peter uses a couple of time. It means muscle stretched to its breaking point. We are to reach as far as we can in expressions of love and pour our lives into other people. That's why I was so thrilled when that guy wrote that article in the magazine called "The Church with

900 Ministers". What he really saw was people giving their lives for each other.

Obviously there has to be content in that discipleship. In other words people only grow in the knowledge of the truth. Grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. The way you grow in grace is through the knowledge and the application of that knowledge. And you can hear the knowledge but it's really important to have some people up against your life who hold you accountable to that because the same sun that melts the wax hardens the clay. And if you hear the truth, hear the truth, hear the truth and you're never in a relationship with somebody where you're held accountable to put that truth into action then you can become hardened by the very truth you hear and you can get very skilled at your indifference.

So discipleship takes you to another level. You put life on life and there's a point of accountability. People always say to me look who holds you accountable. You're up there preaching but who holds you accountable? Well, I have a lot of people who hold me accountable. First of all, the person that holds me most accountable is Patricia. Really? Do you think she expects me live what I preach? Of course. And because I love her and because she is the primary spiritual responsibility God has placed in my life, if I can't give my life to disciple her why would I be given this opportunity. I have to discharge that responsibility first of all in my own family. And then there are my children; my children have very high expectations of me. That's a very, very strong sense of accountability because I love them. And because I don't want to disappoint them and because I want them to love Christ with all their hearts. and then come the grandchildren. And then come my friends and then come the people that I work with and then all of you.

I understand that there is a responsibility that I have to you out of my love and concern for you and my desire for your spiritual growth until Christ is fully formed in you that calls me to my own spiritual growth and commitment. I know in a church that is absolutely critical. We can't isolate people. Isolation is not good. Sin has to have you all by yourself; it wants to isolate you and you are most prone to fall into sin when you are all alone. And we need life on life and that's always been a characteristic of this church.

In fact in the early years we were talking so much about discipleship people would come up sometimes in a panic and they would say John, John, I don't have anybody discipling me. Like you know they were somehow gonna fall out of the kingdom if it didn't happen in the next 24 hours. I don't have anybody discipling me. Could you find somebody to disciple? And we would always try to - By the way, you all need to have those relationships. You say well I don't know if I can disciple anybody. I don't know much. Look hard; you'll find somebody who knows less than you do. You might not know as much as somebody else. So here's how it works, find somebody who knows more than you, is more spiritually mature, let them invest in you, find somebody who knows less and is less spiritually mature and pour your life into them. This is a relay race.

Paul says, "The things that you heard from me give to faithful men who are able to teach others also." Paul to Timothy to faithful men to others also. We're all in that flow. I was given a legacy by those who taught me. I'm discharging it to you. You're given a legacy by those who teach you; who are you discharging that to? Starts in your family doesn't it. And then it extends to whatever opportunities you have. You don't want to be the end of the line do you? You're not a cul-de-sac, you're not a dump, you're not the last stop. I think there are some people who think that they're a spiritual dump. They just wanna go and have all the doctrine unloaded on them as if they had no responsibility to do anything with it. But you know cover it up with the dirt of their indifference. You're not the dump. You're a channel, you're a thoroughfare and somebody's waiting to have you pass it on. Older women teach the younger women. Older men teach the younger.

There's another element I don't know - would this be number eight? Intense love. Intense love. You know whatever we've been saying about these things it can't exist without love. The truth of that love Paul says in 1 Corinthians 13 is like a clanging cymbal. It's just noise. And it gratifies me that I know John 13:34-35; I preached it very early in the church life by this law know that you're my disciples that you have love for one another. I've always known that love should mark the church and I've seen a lot of churches that were heavy on sound doctrine, that were polemical and were strong on issues and wanted to be discerning and they had such a hard edge that no matter how sound their teaching was people avoided them like the plague. And so I've always tried to convey in the life of our church at every level that I can that we're gonna love people and we're gonna take them the way they are just the way Jesus loved the 12 who were so hard to teach. No matter how many times He taught them they seemed to always just kind of miss it. He exhibited so much patience. Preached the word in season, out of season, retort, rebuke with all patience. People aren't gonna change over night. And we need to be loving.

I think that's one of the best kept secrets about our church to people on the outside who think we're very doctrinal and we're very biblical and we've got our theology going. But the assumption might be that there might not be a lot of love here. I remember a guy wrote a book and he had a whole chapter on our church one time and we were called the "classroom church" where everybody comes and gets a lecture. Well nothing could really be further from the truth. By the way, he was never here. It's kind of hard to get it right if you don't ever come to see if your ideas are correct. But we want to be a church filled with love, intense love. We wanna live out 1 Corinthians 13 "Love is patient and kind. It believes all things. It bears all things. It hopes all things. It's never rude. It's never unkind. It's always sacrificial. It's always humble." We wanna love the unlovely and the unlovable. We wanna love the way Christ loved. We want this place to be known for its love and its tenderness and its compassion and its affection otherwise our theology is meaningless. We're just noise.

And I knew that from the go and I now know that it's true and I will tell you this, if I were to surprise people who have never been here and I do this from time to time and they ask me what's the great

strength of your church I would say the love of the people for the Lord and each other. They kind of get a funny look on their face. But I really do believe that that's Ephesians 4, "And when the leaders do the work of the ministry and the body is built up it's built up in love." And from the beginning that was one of the pillars that was important to me.

Number nine, and we talked about this this morning so I won't go into it, fellowship. Fellowship. And by that I mean mutual ministry. The use of the spiritual gifts and the one anothers sharing, confessing, praying together, bearing burdens, forgiving, rebuking, comforting, exhorting, nourishing, edifying, warning, just pouring our lives into each other. And I mean this church is monumental in terms of its faithfulness. I don't know if there's a church anywhere around here that has the percentage of people involved in ministry that this church does. It's just amazing to me. And some of it is ministry we know about and a lot of it is ministry we don't know about. And we're not saying you need to have a formal title, you need to have a formal ministry. We passed out that little brochure this morning and identified some of those things. But it's beyond that. It's personal in your own life in the interchange and exchange of those of like precious faith. And this church is just thrilling to me and to our pastors and leaders for its devotion to fellowship, to mutual ministry. And it's always been that way. It was really that way before I came. The early pastors of this church got that message across very clearly. There was a lot of ministry and fellowship. There was this eagerness to serve.

I remember so many funny stories about that. We were having communion one night and they ran out of bread and everybody was so eager they ran over to the church kitchen cause there was gonna be a spaghetti dinner that night and they brought the last few rows of garlic toast. Well garlic toast may not be the right thing for communion, it's a little strange but I loved the attitude and the smell wasn't bad either in our chapel over there as they came roaring in with their garlic toast. There's just sort of a metaphor for the people serving. Sometimes in the early years of Grace Church our Sunday school was growing so fast people would stand out in the patio and say any volunteers for teaching Sunday school and just grab people here or there. I mean they got a little carried away. I remember one Sunday we had a new member in the church, he came up to me and he said, "Who is the drunk usher?" I said what. He said yeah, there's a guy back there, he's a nice buy but he's just stoned every Sunday. He wanted to get into the spirit of the volunteering so he volunteered and I guess somebody didn't know and there he was. Good morning. I mean I was sort of- that was sort of the way it was in those early years. So we had to make a few adjustments, a few - I remember one Sunday school teacher took her class to a brewery one time. I mean we were growing fast, do you understand that and everybody wanted to get involved. We got a little better at sort of screening as time went on.

It's always been that way at this church. Always been that way. There's a tremendous amount of energy and activity. You can come by here any day of the week, almost any time of the day or night and people ask me that, "What goes on at that church all the time?" Ministry, ministry, ministry, fellowship.

I'll just give you two more things. Faithful prayer. Faithful prayer. From the very get go I think about Grandma Kelly who was here when I came, she was really old when I came and died a few years after. But she used to pray for me all the time and there was a little group that gathered around her and prayed and prayed and prayed. They started the Monday prayer time that's still going on today. This church has always been marked by faithful prayer. John 13:13-14, for me I knew how important this was so I knew I needed to sustain that prayer. I knew that it needed to be apart of our ministry that God was gonna move mountains if we were faithful to pray. And John 14:13, "Whatever you ask in My name that will I do that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask anything in My name I'll do it. Anything consistent with My will." and I knew that prayer was the nerve that moved the muscles of omnipotence; it was critical to have praying people. And through the years there's always been that commitment to prayer, always that commitment to prayer. You know it's not necessarily anybody sees but it's there. prayer involves adoration, confession, thanks and supplication and we've always had a praying church and praying people. James said you have not because why? You ask not. We want to tap into those divine resources.

And from the very beginning we wanted to know how to pray. First there was Matthew 6 and the Disciples' Prayer. Recently we were in Luke 11, Luke's version of the Disciples' Prayer, praying boldly; praying confidently has always been a critical part of our church life. And that was so in the very beginning and it's always been so and it's so even now.

And one final thought, sacrificial giving. Sacrificial giving. I remember one Sunday when we were talking about building a new building in the early years because we just exploded and we had to have a new building. A couple came by my office, I think it was on a Monday, after I mentioned we needed help to build the building. And they had in an envelope all the money - they had just gotten married or the were just getting married I think that week and they came by with all the money they had been saving and collecting for their honeymoon and said we canceled our honeymoon; we want to give this to the church. That was just a defining moment. Sacrificial on the part of a young couple. And it's always been that way at Grace Church. Whenever we've said here's a need, here's an opportunity, it's just incredible how you respond.

You did a few weeks ago when I told you about Bezlam. There was \$200,000 that came to that community; \$76,000 came from this church and they know that. they already know about us and they love us. what was the holocaust - before those terrorists ever went into the school they went around the area, the perimeter of that school and anybody they found they slaughtered, they killed. And there were fathers and children sitting in cars waiting for the wife and child to come out of the school and they killed them sitting in their cars. Some of them dove under cars to protect themselves. This isn't something that went awry; they knew what they were gonna do from the very beginning. Then they went in of course and a massacre took place.

But you know what has happened is because of your love and your interest and your care they have translated the little book "Safe in the Arms of God" into Russian to give to all the families in that town to explain what happened to little ones that die and to give them the gospel. Not only that they have a copy of "Faith to Grow On" the little theology book for kids which is already translate into Russian and they are able to publish that and distribute that to every family in that are of 35,000 people. And the Christian church, the strongest church in the area, is right there in view of the school and members of that church are going door to door to door to door to distribute these wonderful helps and to give the gospel of Jesus Christ. They're using the money. And one day alone there were 120 funerals. Now using the money to help the families who lost a father who earned the money and to help even with the funeral.

You've always responded like that. this church has always done that. and I don't think we've even begun to give like we could give. I'm not here to make a pitch at this point but I don't think we've begun to see what God can do here in our giving. We're looking - we gotta do the chapel right away because its' falling apart from the rain and all kinds of problems. Moving forward down it's a \$2 or 3 million project to do all this and to build the annex building. But always you know this church has been sacrificial.

I knew from the beginning that it would take sacrifice. I look at those things and really that's it. I basically gave you my list. I combined one. and I really believed in my heart that if we were committed to this as a church, if we were committed to the absolute authority of Scripture, the high priority of worship, doctrinal clarity, spiritual discernment, personal holiness, a plurality of Godly leaders, discipleship, intense love, fellowship, prayer and sacrificial giving this church would have an impact on the community. That evangelism would be the product. Why? Because we would be letting, "Our light so shine that men might see our good works and glorify your Father in Heaven," Matthew 5:14-16. I knew that this was critical that we could make the gospel believable if our church had this kind of life.

You know the old German philosopher said, Hein, he said this, "Show me your redeemed lives and I might believe in your Redeemer." Is that fair? You say you have a redeemer; let me see your redeemed life, what does it look like. That's the question I would ask. You say you have the truth; show me. This has always been a show me church. You can look at this church, you can look at this congregation, you, and everywhere you go in this community you lay a platform for the credibility of the gospel. The gospel is believable because you're transformed and it shows up in the life of this church. That's why this church is such a shining witness and the testimony from this church has covered this city and has extended around the world. Way beyond what we ever thought would happen.

Well these are borrowed from many years ago the marks of a faithful church and I think you could agree with me we can't change these right? These are the same foundation. May God help us in this generation and whatever other generations come after us until Jesus comes to be faithful to these biblical pillars that are expressive of the will of the Lord Jesus Christ.

All join me in prayer. Lord we know that all that we've said is really because of Your sovereign grace. Why You've put Your hand on this church, why we have come to understand these things when it seems as if they're allusive in so many other environments we can only contribute to Your goodness to us. we understand the blessing, we also understand the responsibility to whom much has given much is required and we want to discharge our stewardship faithfully. To all those saints who've gone before us who are now with you and to all those faithful ones in this beloved church to whom we owe our very experience now because of their faithfulness we say thanks. And we want to commit ourselves to sustaining that faithfulness into the next generation so that this church will always be faithful to the things that please You. and Father we're certainly not saying we've arrived; we haven't arrived. We have not attained. We just know the direction we need to go. And for all of our failure and all of our unfaithfulness and all of our shortcomings we ask Your forgiveness. Help us to be true to what we know You desire for us. truer than we've ever been that the Lord Jesus Christ maybe exalted in His church and we pray in His name. Amen.

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