

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

Foundations of Grace, Part 3: The Design of the Spirit for the Church

Scripture: Selected Scriptures

Code: 80-339

Certainly for me, my 40 years here at Grace Community Church have been a little bit of heaven. I said that in the early service, and I meant that. I don't think any man could have a more faithful wife than God gave me. I don't think anyone could have more faithful, loving children than the Lord gave me...more delightful and precious grandchildren. And I don't imagine that anyone could have a more blessed congregation to serve for all these years than the Lord has given me. I really feel I have lived a little heaven on earth. I am actually expecting serious suffering soon because I have overfilled my cup with the goodness of God. And you have been all that a pastor could ever imagine a church could be, and beyond.

I have heard all the sad stories. I have seen some of them. I lived through some of them as a pastor's kid...difficulty, the challenge, the heart break, discouragement that comes in ministry. But for whatever reasons and for whatever purposes in my life, the Lord has blessed me with what I would consider to be a Thessalonian church. You are my glory and my joy. And it has never been any other than that.

Oh there have been moments when it was trying and challenging and difficult and a few scattered moments when I thought maybe I ought to stop doing what I am doing. But they passed very rapidly. It has been for me heaven on earth. And I really believe that's what the church should be. This is the closest we're ever going to get to heaven in this world and the church should be the closest thing to heaven on earth, and it certainly has been for me.

I hear the sad stories of conflict that pastors have with their congregation. I've been reading again the story of Jonathan Edwards, perhaps the greatest theologian in American history, a preacher, Bible teacher, scholar, theologian, writer without equal, and how his church mistreated him. Did everything they could to destroy him, the best of men. There's certainly no reason I should escape that, but God in His providence and in His mercy has thoroughly blessed my life at every point. And I'm just grateful for that.

So, before we get carried away with next week, we need to understand that all that we have experienced together has been the goodness of God. I go back to the very beginning of my days here and it started out with an openness to the hearing of the Word of God and it has never ever changed. And I thank the Lord for that.

When I was growing up, I had a lot of church experiences. All of them were in the traditional sort of Baptist mode which meant that they were basically small democracies where the people voted for everything, where the power rested with the people, you know, in that great American tradition. And I watched how sort of Baptist democracy worked. There were lots of things about it that I thought were troublesome and troubling and I couldn't find a biblical model for democracy in the church.

I was later in my life exposed to in my college days to a sort of more Methodist approach where you had a little bit more of a hierarchy, but still some power resting with the people. And then in my seminary days I became exposed to the Presbyterian model which is a hierarchical approach to the church and the leaders who are in the area who are known as the elders, the presbytery make determinations for local churches. And I saw things in all of these that seemed to fit scriptural patterns, and I saw things in all of these that did not fit scriptural patterns. So by the time I was getting to the end of my seminary days, I was really wondering what does the Bible say about how a church is to function? I actually didn't have a class in seminary that gave me complete clarity on that question.

I remember around the time that I came here, ministering on the east coast. And I remember the church and I remember the young pastor who was a little older than myself, and I remember preaching in his church and it was a growing church, and going to his house after church on a Sunday night, I actually remember sitting in a rocking chair. Just a vivid memory because of what was said. As I sat and rocked and talked with him a little bit, he said this, "I've just read a book written by a man who has analyzed IBM, a corporate model of IBM and has discerned the principles that have made that corporation so successful. And from that book, I've now learned how to make a church successful." And I think my rocking began to escalate at the rate of my heartbeat when I heard that.

I couldn't even process a statement that somebody writing a book on a secular corporation could have the insights necessary to make the church of Jesus Christ successful. And I remember saying something like, "I think for myself I'll stick with the New Testament because I think that's the intended manual for the church."

I never forget that conversation. And I think that's why I remember vividly the scene and the rocking chair because it was so indelibly impressed upon my mind, it sealed for me the reality that if the church belongs to Jesus Christ, and if He expects us to serve Him in His church faithfully, then He will have revealed for us on the pages of Scripture what is necessary for the church. And so I was all the more galvanized to stick with the New Testament.

Then it became only a matter of searching out the New Testament and endeavoring to discern those things that are taught in the New Testament about the church and what it is to be. It doesn't say a lot about organization. It doesn't say a lot about the kind of specific ministries you should have. But it lays down some inviolable, unalterable principles. And if you know me, you know that I am all about

principles or doctrines. I began to search those things out in the New Testament. I began to pursue them, as I've mentioned to you previously. I desperately needed to know what the New Testament taught about the church.

Maybe that's why the Lord knew I needed a few years between seminary and coming here, so that I could sort that out in my own mind, along with a lot of other things, so that the second Sunday that I was here in February of 1969, I preached from the text that I read to you, the opening chapters of 1 Thessalonians on the subject, "The Ideal Church." By then it had started to take shape in my mind from Scripture. And in that message I pointed out some of the seminal elements of the church, a church is to be saved, as the Thessalonian church was. They were in God our Father and in the Lord Jesus Christ. They were elect. They were a saved church.

Then I noted that they were a sanctified church, clearly. They had received grace and peace from the Lord and it was empowering their lives because their faith was growing and their love was manifest and their service was effective. And they were a suffering church because they were colliding with an unregenerate world and they were willing to take that suffering in the process of living out their holy lives in the community. Then I noted they were a serving church, labor of love, patience of hope, work of faith. And they were a Second Coming church, they were waiting for His Son from heaven and on that second Sunday that I was here, I basically said that. We need to be a truly saved church, elect and regenerate. We need to be a sanctified church. We need to be a suffering church if need be for the cause of the truth in the world. And we need to be a serving church and we need to be a Second Coming church. And I'm so thankful, looking back over 40 years, that that is exactly what this church is. That we understand the true gospel. We are a people who are genuinely in God the Father and in the Lord Jesus Christ. We are the elect. We are the beloved of God. What a joy it is that this is a sanctified community of believers. What a blessing it is to me to see the sanctification work its way out as you manifested in the work of faith, labor of love, steadfastness of hope, perseverance. These things are true of our church.

It is a suffering church. If need be, you have paid the price for your faith in Jesus Christ, in your family, among your friends, sometimes at work, sometimes in your community. And, of all things, you are a serving church. You're relentless about serving. I don't know that there is another church anywhere so internally motivated to serve the Lord as this church is. And for sure, we are a Second Coming church. We have lived all the years, all these 40 years in the anticipation of the return of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Well on that second Sunday in February of 1969, that was like Ecclesiology 101. That was the basic course from those chapters in 1 Thessalonians. And at that point in time, I celebrated the fact that when you heard the Word of God, you heard it as it is, not the word of men, but the Word of God which does its powerful work in you. And that's never changed...that's never changed.

Now those were amazing, amazing early days and they have just gotten more and more amazing through all 40 years. From my standpoint it's gone really fast...very, very fast. I never wanted to...and I used to think about this...I never wanted to come to a point in my life where I asked, "Is this church the result of what I've done? Or is this church the result of what the Lord has done?" So I knew that if I confined it to biblical truth and spiritual ministry, it would be easy to answer the question. And that's why I've said, "Whatever it is you're going to do to me next Sunday isn't the real story. The real story is this church is what it is because of what God has done with His Word by His Spirit in your lives."

At the very beginning, you know, we had to establish that. When I first came, I had been here just a few weeks, some folks came to me in the church and said, "We want you to perform the wedding our daughter is going to marry a man. You're our new pastor." And these people were very prominent in the church...very, very prominent. In fact, there probably weren't people any more visibly prominent than this family. And they said, "Our daughter is getting married," and as it turned out, she was going to marry a non-Christian who had been divorced.

So I hope I responded in a gracious way. I don't have any memory of the actual conversation. But I said, "With all due respect, I'm sorry, I can't do that. I can't do that wedding. I can't marry a believer to a non-believer. I can't make people unequally yoked. The Bible says you can marry only in the Lord. I can't do that."

Well that didn't sit very well. So that was reported to some of the leaders of the church who came to me and said, "So you can't do this? Do you understand these people's involvement and profile in the church...etc., etc.?" I said, "I do, but the Bible is crystal clear about this. I can't do it." To which one replied, "Well, okay, we appreciate that conviction," and I showed them the scriptures of course. And then the response came, "Well, okay, you don't have to do it. We'll have somebody else do it, but we'll do it here and that will be a compromise." I said, I hope graciously, but I don't remember that either, but I said,...I said, "Who's church is this? Who's church is it? Is it your church? My church? Or is it the church of the Lord Jesus Christ?" To which this person whom I love said, "Well, that's that, we can't do it here." And we didn't. And that whole family and all their extended family left the church.

That was a watershed moment for us, when people of this church said we will do what the Word of God says, no matter what the price. It doesn't always happen that way, folks. There are young pastors who go out, they come to some Waterloo like that and it doesn't turn out that way. They wind up leaving and the church pursues its carnal pathway. But in the case of this church, there was an all-embracing commitment on the part of people at the very beginning to say, "Just show us what the Scripture says and we will endeavor to be faithful."

And as I've said through the years, that's like saying, "Sic-'em" to a mad dog. I mean, that is the best news that a preacher could ever hear that all we want to know is what God says and what the Word

says so we can do it. That has marked this church. That has marked this church. Our gospel, like it says in chapter 1 verse 5, didn't come to you in Word only, but in power and the Holy Spirit with full conviction. That's always been true of this church. The Word comes, it comes with power, it is received, it is believed, it is turned in to conviction and that's how we live our lives. Or in chapter 2 verse 13, "We constantly thank God that when you receive the Word of God which you heard from us, you've accepted it not as the word of men but for what it really is, the Word of God which also performs its work in you who believe." And when I say ministry at Grace Church for me for 40 years has been heaven on earth, I mean it has been heaven on earth. I have been so profoundly blessed. My marriage, my family has been heaven on earth for me. My friendships through the years, a taste of heaven...this church, heaven on earth for me. And the bottom line is because the people of this church have always responded to the teaching of the Word of God.

And I understand my role. I am not the source of truth. I am merely the messenger who brings it to you from the source, namely God. I have been given a stewardship, a responsibility to discharge. I'm nothing but a slave...nothing but a slave.

Through the years we have endeavored at every level in this church, myself and everybody else who teaches, to be faithful, to proclaim the Word of the head of the church to His church. Styles change, we recognize that. Technology changes. I watch the ties get wider and wider and thinner and thinner and wider and wider. And that certain fashions come and go, although some of us are impervious to it, a blue suit and a red tie will always work. But we have lived through massive technological changes. We have lived through paradigm shifts that are coming so rapidly, we can't even keep up with them. And I'm watching churches become obsolete before they become effective because they can't keep up chasing the latest fad. And we haven't changed anything except what should change. But what can't change, doesn't change. The Lord Jesus Christ doesn't change, the same yesterday, today and forever, the eternal God is immutable and the Word never changes, it is eternal.

There's really no question about why this church is what it is. It is because of the Word of God. It reflects the teaching of the Word of God over these many, many years. I confess that where I am weak, you are likely weak as well. Where I am strong, you are strong. My imperfections sadly becomes yours because like people, like priest is how it is. So the responsibility and accountability on my life is indeed great. That's why James says, "Stop being so many teachers, theirs is a greater condemnation." I understand that I have to give an account for the ministry that I have because you are going to be a reflection of that in a very real and personal way.

So I understand that I am far from perfect, I am less than I should be. I understand that my weaknesses and my shortcomings show up in you. But there is one thing that I've never wavered on, and that is the fact that when I stand in this place, I will tell you the best I can from my heart what God says. And we have continued to pursue that through all the years of our ministry together. This has been for me the best of all things. If you want to create heaven on earth, spend your whole life in the

Word of God.

There's a reason, I think, why this church is a heaven on earth, in a sense. Why my own marriage and my own family as heaven on earth, it's because they've all continually been bathed in the truth of the Word of God. I don't think you can get what's going on in this church if you come once, or twice, or for a month. I think it's so powerfully cumulative that it takes a long time. But once...once you understand it, you really understand it.

I was talking to somebody this morning who said, "I've been here 28 years and every year that I'm here I want to be here more." What a wonderful testimony.

Well in those early years, as I was trying to figure out what is it in the Word of God that we need to focus on, what has to be the pillars of this church, what has to be the foundation stones? I came up with a little series I did many, many years ago called "Marks of a Faithful Church," or "Marks of an Effective Church." And through the years I've revisited that little list again and again. It was forming in my mind in the very first days that I was here. I preached it. I've changed it, altered it, shifted it around but basically it's the same now 40 years later as it was in the beginning. I kind of moved the order around a little bit, crystalized how I stated them, but there are some marks that are foundational to the life of this church that explain why we're the kind of church we are.

By the way, they're included in the book that I wrote called Shepherdology, now called The Master's Plan For The Church...one of the early books. And these are truths that we revisit over and over again. But in that little series many years ago, I kind of put them in the following order. Here they are.

These are the marks of a faithful church. Number one, Belief in the absolute authority of Scripture...belief in the absolute authority of Scripture. When I say absolute, I mean the authority that belongs to Scripture and only Scripture. It is complete authority and it is singular authority. There is no other authority. I'm not an authority, nobody else is an authority, no tradition is an authority, no creed is an authority, no history is an authority, the Bible is the only authority and it is an absolute authority. This is the dominating truth that reigns over everything.

It was some...not too many years ago, just a couple of years ago, that Patricia and I, I think you were with me, hon, I can't remember all the trips we take, but anyway, I was in London and we went to a Scottish Presbyterian church. And I don't remember a lot about it, they sung some hymns that were familiar to me which I always love. And the message was not particularly biblical. But something stayed with me and it was this, that when the service began, the organ played a kind of an introduction and then the congregation arose to its feet and stood in silence while a man walked from the very back of the church, down the main aisle, holding a big Bible above his head like this.... The Bible made a grand entrance. It was like a king had come into the room. The ultimate authority was arriving. And he walked all the way down the aisle and placed that on the pulpit and at the end of the

service, when it was completed, the same man picked up in the same way, carried it back out. And it was a symbolic statement that the Scripture reigns here.

We don't do that, but we understand the principle and the truth of that symbol. They had the symbol, I don't think they understood the principle. We don't do that symbolically, but we do understand that the Word of God reigns. When we come here, it's as if the Word of God is brought to us from God Himself, placed here for me to explain to you.

This is inseparable, by the way, from the priority of preaching because Paul says, "Preach the Word...Preach the Word...Preach the Word at all levels of church ministry. Early on in the ministry here, I was teaching Acts 20:20, Paul says, "I have not failed to declare unto you the whole counsel of God., and it's all profitable for you." Paul says to Timothy, "All Scripture is inspired by God," pas graphe, all writing, all Scripture is inspired by God, profitable to accomplish everything regarding spiritual perfection and spiritual maturity, both for the preacher and for all under his influence. Peter says that this is not the product of men, but holy men were moved by the Spirit of God. It's not a document that comes from a human source, but from the Holy Spirit Himself. And as we just read, it is not the word of men, it is the Word of God.

We understood that from the beginning. We understand as a church that salvation comes through the Word, you're begotten again by the word of truth, 1 Peter 1:23. You're sanctified by the Word, John 17:17, Your word is truth, sanctify them by Your truth. We understand the comfort of the Scriptures. We understand I have hope in Thy Word, as the psalmist puts it. We understand the power is in the passage, the power is in the Scripture and we have an absolute commitment to that.

I remember in the seventies when I did a series on Ephesians, and I was talking about the fact that women who are Christians are mandated in the Scripture to be lovers of their husband, lovers of their children, keepers at home. This was in a time when women going to work was a massive movement. And I was going against the grain of that, saying your priority is your husband, your children. Your domain is the home. And I preached a series on that and someone who was part of our church took issue with that, called the Los Angeles Times. They ran an article on the front page that said, "Church fires all its female employees." Which was not true, we didn't do that. And that just stirred up all kinds of trouble. The Feminists came after us. We had all three networks with television cameras in the patio, ABC, NBC, CBS and people poured into the church.

What happened...kind of an ironic thing was so many people came because of this big hubbub that when the choir left, we filled the choir loft filled full with people because there were so many people in our two services. The really interesting part about it was, the choir loft was always filled with the people who came late because they didn't know you needed to come early to sit there, and so it was all the angry visitors who sat behind me. So I was preaching to a smiling audience who were looking at a smirky crowd in the choir loft, taking issue with everything I said.

I remember an interview with one of the news anchors locally who said to me, "How in the world do you get these women to buy into this?...I'll never forget this quote....They seem like intelligent women." I said, "Well they are intelligent women, but you have to understand this, they have already made a commitment to the authority of Scripture in general, so whatever the Scripture says in specific, they eagerly obey."

And that's always been the way that has been here. We are dominated by the authority of Scripture. And whatever the Scripture says, as a church we have eagerly embraced from the leadership all the way down.

The second in my little list, this priority of significance, Commitment to worship, commitment to worship. You can do a lot of things in a church and there are a lot of things done. But the one thing we are commanded to do is worship. So everything is driven toward God, exalting Him, honoring Him, praying to Him, extolling Him. Even the exposition of the Word of God is with the intention of worship.

I remember early in the ministry people were saying that I preached too long and there's not enough time for worship. How can you worship? How can your church really worship when you take all the time preaching? To which my response is, how can any church worship if you don't take the time preaching? Because what you're doing is preaching is informing them about the God they worship which enriches their worship. That's the point. I'm not trying to divide this service into worship and education, the whole thing is worship. Are you going to worship God superficially, or are you going to worship Him in the depth and breadth and height and length of His revelation of Himself?

This commitment to worship is what drives us because it's what defines us. What are you going to do forever in heaven? What? Worship, you were saved to worship. John 4, "The Father seeks true worshipers." That's why you were saved, to be a worshiper. You would think today the kind of so-called gospel being proclaimed that the good news is you're in charge and God really wants to worship you. He just wants to come alongside and give you everything you want.

That's just the opposite. We understand we're here not to worship us but to worship Him. He's the audience. You're not even the audience, ultimate audience, you're the intermediary. I teach you so that you can worship Him. We used to talk about the fact that people come to church and say, "Well, I don't know, I didn't get anything out of it." Really. You thought it was for you? You didn't get anything out of it, huh? What did you think it was for, for you? The question is, what did you bring to God? What did you lift up to Him of adoration, praise, thanks?

So the more you know about Him, the more you worship. Philippians 3 says, "We are...this is defining Christians...those who worship God in the spirit, glory in Christ Jesus have no confidence in the flesh." We are worshipers. Word informed worshipers.

So, we've emphasized a high view of God, a high view of Christ, a high view of the Holy Spirit. You know, I was thinking about it just the other day, 40 years of ministry, if you just took the time in Matthew, the time in Luke and the time in John, it would be over 50 percent of the time, 21 years focusing on those three gospels, we've got one more to go. So maybe I'll spend 23-24 years of ministry on Sunday mornings looking at Jesus Christ. How important is that? God has revealed Himself, Hebrews 1 says, in the Old Testament through the prophets, but in these last days He has revealed Himself in His Son, the most magnificent glorious purest most perfect picture of God is in Christ. That is why He is the most compelling, riveting subject of all subjects. And we have given many, many years our attention to know the Lord Jesus Christ. And in knowing Him, you know God.

What did Jesus say? "If you've seen Me, you've seen the Father." It is our clear understanding of who God is, who Christ is, who the Holy Spirit is, it is that trinitarian understanding that is at the heart of our worship. Don't let anybody tell you that somehow worship is something that happens apart from knowledge. That's why we don't do the 7-11 kind of singing, seven words eleven times. That's why we sing...that's why we sing hymns, that's why we reach deep, that's why we articulate theology in our hymnology, theology in our doxology.

Thirdly, I'm having a hard time shutting off any of these points, as you can imagine, even though I don't have anything to say written down, just so much in my heart. Third point that I would make, and this is another pillar, another foundation in our church life, Doctrinal Clarity, doctrinal clarity.

When I talk about the Word of God and studying the Word of God, I also mean extracting from the Word of God the sound doctrine that is necessary. What is true about God. What is true about Christ. What is true about the Spirit of God. What is true about man. What is true about sin, righteousness, heaven, hell, every issue of Scripture. And so we exposit the Scripture with what I call a theological exposition. You dig into the Word of God, you determine what the passage is saying and therefore what immutable, unchangeable truths it is affirming. Those become the doctrines that the text yields. Every text drives us to some doctrine, some affirmation of truth. And then, if you're kind of giving away trade secrets here, if you follow what I do, I will usually, having taken the passage, pulled out of it those doctrines, I will then trace them in other parts of the Scripture to show you how they are supported elsewhere in Scripture with a view to have you understand that doctrine with the hope then that that understanding becomes not just information but conviction.

Paul was thankful for the Thessalonians because the Word came to them, chapter 1 verse 5, with full conviction. Conviction means you believe it, you own it, you guard it, you defend it. You know, you live out your convictions. And so in teaching the passage, extracting the doctrine, showing how this doctrine is consistently taught in Scripture so that you understand it and believe it with a view that it will become a conviction in your life that will be a factor determining your conduct. That's what we're after.

Doctrinal clarity is absolutely critical. Paul says to Titus, "Speak the things concerning sound doctrine." Paul says to Timothy over and over again, 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, sound doctrine, sound doctrine. Paul tells the Ephesians that it's very dangerous to be children tossed to and fro and carried about by every wind of doctrine. So I'm really after developing in you a set of strong convictions. Certainly the Lord has developed them in me. That's why I get a little combative with error cause I'm driven by the convictions concerning what is true. And I don't understand the people who aren't, who are supposed to be ministers of the gospel, guardians of the truth, we're supposed to guard the treasure, hold fast to the truth, and seem unwilling to contend earnestly, seem weak in their convictions. Not for a minister to be weak in his convictions, not even for a Christian to be weak in conviction, or your life will flip-flop all over everywhere. You need to believe the truths with all your heart.

That leads to a fourth, spiritual discernment...spiritual discernment. It's connected to doctrinal clarity. Only when you have doctrinal clarity can you have spiritual discernment. Only when you know the truth can you tell the counterfeit, right?

Just a passage, also, in 1 Thessalonians chapter 5 and verse 19, that is good to grasp because it's readily understood. Verse 19, 1 Thessalonians 5, verse 19, "Do not quench the Spirit." Now the Spirit is the fountain of living water that comes to us with the truth of God. The Spirit is the author of revelation. So when the flow of the great life-giving, life-changing water of the Spirit comes to us through the Word, do not quench the Spirit.

How does the Spirit minister? Not in some mysterious, mystical way, but the Spirit ministers through the Word. So don't quench the Spirit. Now in order to avoid quenching the Spirit, do not belittle or despise prophesying, or preaching. This is the means the Spirit has ordained. The preaching of the cross might be to those that perish foolishness, for those of us who are being saved. No, it's the power of God, 1 Corinthians 1. Preach the Word, 2 Timothy 4. Preaching is the means. So the Spirit is going to flow to you when the Word is preached to you. Do not despise preaching. We live in a day when preaching is despised. We're a little bit anachronistic here, a little bit off the current mode, current trail in doing what we do. We're doing what we do because God has mandated us to do it. Do not despise prophesying, or preaching, because this is the means by which the Spirit of God brings the truth to you. But examine, verse 21, everything carefully. You don't want to despise the preaching, you just want to discern its truthfulness. You want to be like the noble Bereans in Acts 17 who search the scriptures to see if these things were so. Hold fast to that which is then revealed and determined to be good and push yourself away from anything that is evil. This is discernment, this is discernment.

We've endeavored through the years to help you develop discernment by giving you doctrine that is clear, convictions that are true and strong and trustworthy and enduring. And then you have discernment. You can tell error when you see it. You can spot it. You know when you're hearing it.

There's a fifth foundation and that is the pursuit of holiness, the pursuit of holiness. Through the years, holiness was a subject that I was interested in. I remember when I was in junior high school. I picked up a copy out of my Dad's study of Thomas A'Kempis. Thomas A'Kempis was a Catholic mystic, and I was trying to understand true spirituality. What was it? I didn't know if I had ever seen it. Then there was some attraction in the kind of mysticism that Thomas A Kempis wrote about.

I also remember reading a book on prayer by E.M. Bounds who was very mystical. And he told all about people who prayed so long they wore holes in the wooden floor. And I wondered what kind of spirituality that was. That was in junior high when I was finding curiosity about what is real holiness, what is real spirituality.

When I went away to college, I was exposed to legalism. In fact, I went to a place that some might think is the capital of legalism. I had never seen legalism that close. I didn't get it. I didn't understand it. I was a Christian. I loved the Lord. I wanted to honor the Lord. I saw something that I had never seen where everybody's spirituality was evaluated externally by what you didn't do, or what you did do. How you dressed, how you did your hair. And I couldn't process this. I could see behind the superficiality, the reality wasn't there.

I was also exposed in my seminary days and very soon after to antinomianism which is the opposite of legalism. Antinomianism was rampant, in fact, I grew up with antinomianism everywhere. What do I mean by that? I kind of lawless form of Christianity where you're a Christian but nobody would ever know it.

And it was the product of a cheap grace, shallow gospel that I eventually addressed in books like *The Gospel According To Jesus*. The Christian landscape was just loaded with people who quote/unquote made a decision for Christ, came forward, signed a card and didn't live a holy life, or even pursue holiness. They obviously had not been transformed, was not a New Testament kind of salvation. So it was important to me that we, first of all, establish the reality of true salvation and then the necessity of true sanctification and that we as a church congregation pursue holiness.

In those early years, 2 Corinthians 7:1 ran around in my mind, still does. "Let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh, perfecting holiness in the fear of God." First Peter 1, "Be ye holy as I am holy." Taken from the book of Leviticus. Where was holiness and what did it look like?

And then Matthew 6, I began to think about what does it mean, "Let Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven." Well certainly that's got to include holiness because holiness is what defines heaven. And the only place holiness is ever going to come to earth is in the church. And then, of course, Matthew 18 says, "If anybody in the church is sinning, go to the person, confront him, call for a confession of repentance. If they don't respond, take two or three witnesses. If they still don't, tell the church. If they

still don't, put them out." First Corinthians 5, "A little leaven leavens the whole lump." You've got to get the influencing sinner, the false professor, the iniquitous person away or he'll poison the rest. And I began to realize that holiness is a pursuit of the church. It's not that we have reached perfection in any of these things, but we know what our direction is. And it is these things that we pursue. We've always pursued them...holiness.

One other that I'll just comment briefly on, a plurality of godly leaders...a plurality of godly leaders. It seemed to me that the New Testament is very clear that a local church had a plurality of godly leaders called elders, pastors, or bishops, overseers, three different words, episkopos, presbuteros, poimen, meaning pastor. All the same person but that there would always be a plurality of them. And they would work collectively, not in a hierarchy with one top dog and everybody kind of in a pecking order underneath, but a collegial face-to-face circle of godly leaders, differing gifts. Some would be a chief speaker like Paul was when he was with Barnabas, or Peter was when he was with John. But they would all serve and they would all have the same qualifications. Laid out, 1 Timothy 3, Titus 1, clear qualifications. They would all be apt to teach, didaktikos, skilled in teaching and handling the Word of God, because how else can you lead the church unless you can disseminate the truth of Scripture to them?

And so, from the beginning, all I ever thought about was a collection of men who would be effective godly leaders. And so, from the very beginning I started a Saturday morning class to try to build men. And God has honored that through these years. Now we have a seminary with 400 men being trained to be godly leaders. We have a thousand graduates out. We have...what?...13 or 14 hundred men being trained in our international training centers and another 14 or 15 hundred who have graduated. Thousands of men have come through the developing ministry of training to be godly leaders in the church. This is..this has reached proportions that were way beyond anything I ever imagined. This church has always been led by a plurality of godly men. I understand that I am sort of the chief speaker. But I have no higher rank, just a different gift used in a different way.

Well, if I had time and I don't, I would talk also of devotion to discipleship, another feature of the church. Mutual love, another pillar of this church. Consistent service, faithful prayer, sacrificial giving, all those things. But the goal of it all, what is the goal? What has always been the goal, there's only one goal, one goal, the goal is this, evangelism, winning lost people to Christ, that's the goal, that's the objective. Filling the great commission, go into all the world, preach the gospel to every creature. Why do we train men? So that men can go and proclaim the gospel. Why do we build you up? So that you can be mature in Christ and you can show the credibility of the gospel by the godly life you live. Why do we teach you the gospel? So that you can teach it to someone who needs to hear it. All evangelism, everything is for your sake that from you might go forth the gospel.

This church, although most people wouldn't think it on the outside, is primarily an evangelistic center where people are coming to Christ; and that's the way it ought to be. That's the goal of everything.

We're not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, we know it's the power of God unto salvation, don't we?
To everyone who believes.

Well, it's to the glory of the Lord who has done exceeding, abundantly above all we can ask or think
that we say all these things.

Father, thank You so much for a refreshing and wonderful morning together. Thank You for the great
work You have done to display Your glory. My own heart is just so greatly encouraged to see these
people who have come into the Kingdom because You've used this congregation, these folks and the
proclamation of the truth here as the means to reach others. Do it, Lord, yet in the future, exceed
what has happened up to now. May all that has gone before, all the 40 years, may it just be the
prologue. May the great work lie at our feet ahead. May You be glorified. May Christ be exalted. May
Your church be faithful to the revelation of the Spirit so that You will bless us and may the blessing
yet to come be greater for Your glory, we pray. Amen.

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