

**Non-Negotiables of the Church: Worshipping God**

Scripture: Selected Scriptures

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The next few weeks as I am with you, I'm not going to go back to our series on 2 Corinthians until we can get some real continuity. As we get to the end of the month of September, we'll be able to do that. But in the meantime, it's been suggested to me and, of course, I fully agree, that I would be well served to address some matters with regard to the church. This is a time of transition in our church. We have so many new people in our church and because of the fact that much of my time when I'm away from Grace Church I am teaching on the church, I always have the lingering thought that I hope that everybody at Grace understands what I'm teaching all these other people. I realize that we have many, many new people and many of you not being here for many years have missed some of the most formidable and foundational teaching that we've done as to the identity of the church. And simply stated, the church is in an identity crisis today. I hear that everywhere I go in the world. There are so many different ways that people are being told the church is to function, so many different ways the church is to be identified and defined, and is to function and meet and minister. People are in utter confusion.

This last week I did some teaching on the church at a Bible Conference, and it was just a cacophony of complaints to me every single day after every message from people who cannot figure out what in the world their church is doing. Confused by the leadership, confused by the nature of the church, confused by a redefinition of its ministry. People are just at sea with regard to what is the character and nature of the church. What are we all about? How are we to act, to live? What are we to believe? What is the substance of our life as a church? How are we to conduct our gatherings together? What is our purpose when we meet? When we scatter? What are the functions that should be going on in the life of the church? It's just amazing how the church is being continually redefined. All of us need to understand this because we are the living church.

Just out of curiosity. How many of you have come to Grace Church in the last five years? Put your hand up if you've come in the last five years. You can see that it's probably...well, maybe nearly half of the congregation. Certainly well over a third and I'm sure many more in the last ten years. It was 1984 when I last did a specific series on the church which I called "The Anatomy of the Church." That's twelve years ago and most of you, obviously, were not here and I'm sure that those of you who

were have forgotten what I said. But much of the time as I travel around the world, I am asked to teach about the church, whether it's in New Zealand or Kazakstan or South Africa or up in Canada or even in the Midwest or the eastern part of our country or wherever it is that I go, I am continually asked to do that. I went to Brazil, as you know, earlier in the year and they asked me to spend the week teaching about the church. And now my recent trip to New Zealand, every time I went to a new city we had a conclave of pastors and leaders asking me to give instruction from the New Testament with regard to the church, to pastors and lay leaders and elders and deacons and students and congregations as well, in all sorts of cultures, all sorts of denominations, all sorts of styles. I went all the way from what you would call the low church, which means a very informal kind of worship among the ?????? to concluding my ministry just before I ran fast to the airport to catch the last plane home, speaking in an Anglican church, a traditionally English Anglicanism in the St. John Church in Christ Church, New Zealand, a very high church liturgical kind of approach and everything in between. And in that spectrum of styles and cultures, there are all kinds of approaches vying for their place in the sun. People are so confused about the church.

I heard an interview on one of these Christian radio programs where somebody called up and said to the talk person on the other line, answering on behalf of the station, "I'm looking for a church. I want to find a church. What criteria do I use?" To which the person replied, "Well, you need to find a place that is warm and accepting and loving and non-judgmental."

And I said, "That's a bar. That's not a church." When you look for a church, you better look for something more than that. People don't know what to look for. People are floating around. I hear about this even here. People saying, "Well, I don't know, I'm going to try this church and I'll try that church and I'll try the other church." That would be fine if they had a criteria then you would have something to make your judgment on, then you'd have some measurement. But I'm not sure that the people know what the criteria is.

I was talking to one person at this conference and this person said to me, "Well, we were looking for a church and we went to this church and we know they really don't preach the Bible, but, you know, there was this nice couple and they made us feel so welcome and we went out to eat afterwards and we've never left, three years ago."

Well, I'm happy for that nice couple, but that's not the criteria. What should a church be? What should a church look like and sound like and feel like and act like? There's such widespread confusion and chaos about this that it's amazing, absolutely amazing. There is a resurgence, by the way, of sort of orthodox Protestantism, the Greek Orthodox style. A resurgence of high church liturgy, the genuflecting and bowing and people wearing, you know, outlandish priestly garments and all of that. At the same time on the other extreme there is a tremendous escalation of the pragmatic

church. In fact, this week I read in a national Christian magazine about a certain seeker-friendly church in our country that now offers to change your oil while you're in church. So there doesn't seem to be any limitation to what a church can be. I mean, there's just no sacred ground at all, it seems. Churches are unwilling to trust the Scripture or ignorant of it, unwilling to trust the power of the Holy Spirit or ignorant of it, unwilling to trust the purposes of God which will be accomplished in the church or ignorant of it. Pastors and people everywhere trying to formulate a church that is more popular, more acceptable and more relevant to the world. All kinds of things are coming into existence, all over the world this stuff is going. And generally it gets exported out of America.

Now one thing has always been true here at Grace Church and that is this, that we are utterly committed to following the Word of God in the life of the church. It's not really that difficult, you just read the Bible and it defines the church as to its nature, as to its purpose, as to its ministry. We have been doing this for years here at Grace Church, just going by the Scriptures because we trust them completely. We've had Shepherds' Conferences here for well over twenty years. We've had thousands of men come here to those conferences and women from all over the world. We have also held Shepherds' Conferences across this nation and around the world, a number of them even this summer down in South Africa, then over in New Zealand by other than myself. And even in recently Pat Howells(??) time in Prague, Czechoslovakia. This is just part of our church life, to go all across this country and around the world and hold Shepherds' Conferences and talk about the nature of the church. We've written all kinds of books and materials and done everything we can to inform people as to the character of the church.

As I travel I am frequently asked to speak on this subject and to write on it. And even now a new book is coming out, really an update of a book I wrote years ago on the body of Christ. And people all over the world are looking to our church. And because I'm always speaking and teaching and writing as are others of our staff members doing this, even recently a brand new book came across my desk written by Wayne Mack and Dave Swavely. Dave is now Associate Pastor, just left to go to Napa, California, but Wayne, of course, still among us. And we're always talking about the character and the nature of the church and life in the church. And it strikes me that it may be possible that there are people around the world who know more about that than some of you folks here at Grace because we haven't addressed it. And so I've had this lingering fear that maybe I ought to stop and take some time to give you the kind of things that we've been teaching these other people from the Word of God.

So that's what I want to do. And it's just going to be kind of a link sausage deal. I don't know what I'm going to say each time, but it's like link sausage, you whack it off anywhere, you get the whole deal. So we'll give you some links this morning and some more links tonight and then next Sunday morning, and next Sunday night, and we'll just kind of meander through this month and next, looking at the nature of the church. It's not going to be unorganized, I think you know me better than that, but I'll just kind of whack it at any given point.

Now, I want you to get all of this and I know that some of you don't come on Sunday night. We're going to pray for your spiritual development, however, this afternoon so that you'll be back tonight because what I'm going to say tonight is of equal weight to what I'm going to say this morning. And what I want you to know that I'm so glad to be back. It has been hard to be gone so long. I really want to settle back in. People have said to me a number of times, "Now that Lance is gone, my dear partner Lance is gone off to his church in Arkansas, who is going to replace him?" And the answer is, I have volunteered for that responsibility, to sort of step back in to a more direct leadership role and I'm excited and thrilled about that. That's what I've been called to do. It was great to have him there and to train him for what God has for him to do, but I'm going to give it a shot and see what I can make out of it in the months ahead. So it's exciting for me to be back. Our church has never been healthier. I've never been more enthusiastic about it. I've seen God's hand mightily upon us. All of the signs of growth and development and encouragement are everywhere around us. I do believe with all my heart these are the richest times in all the 27 years I've been here. At the same time I know that there are efforts, however small, to harm the work of the Lord, I know that. That's inevitable. And I have heard some of that. The enemy loves to do right here what he wanted to do in Corinth that we've been seeing in our study of 2 Corinthians. He wants to circulate innuendos and cause you to mistrust me and to mistrust church leadership and circulate subtle attacks on me as they did on Paul and on others in leadership to undermine your trust and to undermine your confidence and to question...cause you to question our integrity or our devotion to the Lord or to you. Some of you have heard those accusations or have read them first hand or second hand, you've been made aware of them. Some of the folks in our church may be wanting to believe those kind of things and there may be a measure of discontent or some divisiveness in some people's minds and even some cruelty in things that are said. But just to keep that in perspective, the church has never been healthier. Those things may be present, that seems to be the order of things always in the life of the church. The more that the Lord is working, the more the enemy does to undermine it.

But I want you to know that I think that this church has the hand of God mightily upon it. I thank God for what He's doing in our midst. I was astounded to walk into the city council and have the mayor say to me, "Don't leave, we need your church in this city because of its impact on this city for good." Have the city councilmen tell me that, "Your lives in this community are making a tremendous difference." The unconverted community in Los Angeles doesn't know me, they don't know me. The Christian people do, but the rest don't, they know you and you're the ones that are making a difference and God is using you mightily in this city. As this city gets more complex and more diverse in terms of cultures and races, the ministry of this church becomes more marvelous as the world comes to us. These are great days for our church.

But it's important as our church grows and many new people are coming to our church that we understand what it is we are committed to and lest you even be lured away over some trivial thing, you need to understand the real criteria that make a church a church. Now for me to sort of dispense this, I need a framework and a model and a structure, and that's what I'm going to do and I'm going to choose a biblical one. I want to talk to you about the anatomy of the church, which is a title I used back in 1984, but I'm going to try to structure it a little bit differently. The anatomy of the church.

The church, after all, is the body of Christ. It is so stated in Ephesians 1, Ephesians 4, Colossians 1 and Colossians 2 that the church is like a body. That is Christ is the head and all of the members make up the various components of the body. And under the direction of the head, the body functions to the honor of Jesus Christ. When you understand the body metaphor, you have a great potential to understand the character of the church. Christ is the head of His church. He is the one ruling in His church. He is the one leading. He is the brain, as it were, that sends down all the signals to which the body responds. Christ being the head of His church, we being the body, if we understand that, we understand the unique identity of the church.

Now we're going to look then at the anatomy of the church, and I'm going to look at four aspects of it in the sermons to come, morning and evening. We'll cover this again tonight...the skeleton which is the obvious framework upon which everything else depends. You have to have something to hang everything else on. Secondly, the internal systems, the organic life the church has. Thirdly, the muscles, or activities the church engages in. And fourthly, the flesh, or the forms that it takes, the outward forms. So we're going to take those four aspects of sort of spiritual physiology and take a look at the anatomy of the church. As I say, this is a very important foundational study because you need to know those things that are to be true of the church of the Lord Jesus Christ. Churches don't know this. Leaders don't know this or they're not committed to it. And what happens is, the church dishonors the head, the church dishonors the Lord Jesus Christ by being man-centered, irreverent, trivial, flippant, giving Scripture only relative authority rather than absolute authority, lacking discernment, failing to deal seriously with sin and being weak in the development of spiritual leadership. All of those things are a result of a failure to be committed to the church in the terms in which the Bible defines it. So we're in great need of a biblical understanding of the church. That's really everything we need to know about it. And when we get that in mind, we can live in accordance with that definition.

I want this church to be everything that God wants it to be. I want us just like Paul did, I want us to be in these terms, I want us to be presented to Christ as a pure virgin, 2 Corinthians 11:2. I want the church to be what Christ wants it to be. And so let's look at this blueprint for the anatomy of the church and we'll start with the first thing this morning, the skeleton.

You can't have a functioning body without a skeleton. All you'd have is a heap of tissue lying somewhere with an inability to operate. It is the skeleton that is the framework to which everything is attached and upon which everything finds its proper place. The internal organs are all attached to that framework. The muscles are all attached to that framework and the skin is wrapped around that. It gives the form. It provides the foundation for the body and for the life of the church. So let's talk about skeleton. Let's talk about framework. Let's talk about the foundational truths. Let's talk about the basics, the non-negotiables that are at the very center of the being of the church.

Now to begin this, I'm going to give you five of these basics, five non-negotiables, five skeletal things, five things that are framework that set the structure of the church in its place. But in order to have you understand the continuity and the centrality of that and how they hang together, I want to start with a concept that I think will help. Go to Matthew 6...Matthew 6, and I'm just going to give you the first of those five this morning. I have hoped to give more, but it's just a problem I always have.

Matthew 6, Jesus teaching us to pray. And Jesus says in Matthew 6 verse 9, "Pray this way." Here's how I want you to pray. "Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name. Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." Now that is a very familiar section of Scripture which we have memorized, which we have sung. Thousands of times those words have gone across our lips through the years if we have been Christians for any length of time, very familiar territory biblically. But let me just take you a little more deeply into it from the perspective of our discussion this morning. "Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name, Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." That statement "on earth as it is in heaven" really...really supports those two prior statements, or those three prior statements. "Hallowed be Thy name, Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done," all three of those things on earth as it is in heaven. We want Your name hallowed on earth. We want Your Kingdom to come on earth. We want Your will to be done on earth. Jesus said that's what you must pray for. In a word, pray that heaven comes down. Pray that what is going on in heaven will go on in earth. What is going on in heaven? God's name is hallowed, His Kingdom comes, His will is done, pray that that happens on earth. We've all prayed that. We've prayed that over and over. We've sung it over and over. But have we ever grasped what it is saying? How can heaven come down? Where is God going to be hallowed? Where is His Kingdom going to be on this earth? Where are His subjects going to come and submit together to His glory and His sovereignty? Where is His will going to be done on earth?

I'll tell you. Only one place. Where is it? The church. It's not going to happen in Washington. It's not going to happen in New York at the United Nations. It's not going to happen in Brussels at the common European economic community. It's not going to happen in any great university. It is only in the church where heaven comes down. And God wants His name, His Kingdom, His will on earth just

the way it is in heaven. That's the church. We bring heaven down.

By very definition then, the church is utterly unlike the world. We are not citizens of this world, we are citizens of heaven. We have been translated into the Kingdom of God's dear Son. We are a Kingdom of priests. We belong as subjects of the living Christ in a very unique identity. We are strangers and aliens in this world. We belong to another realm. We are citizens of heaven. Our Lord is there. Our name is there. Our home is there. Our hope is there. Our treasure is there. Our inheritance is there. We are heavenly people living on earth. And when we gather together, we bring heaven down.

Moving that into a practical thought, the church should be utterly unlike the world as much as heaven is unlike the world. Unbelievers should not come to a church and sit down and say, "This feels familiar. This feels comfortable. I can get into this. I relate to this." That would be to indicate that the church was not like heaven but like earth. I would rather than an unbeliever come into the church and say, "What is this? I have never seen anything like this. I have never heard anything like this. I've never experienced anything like this. This is not like anything I know of in the world. This is something completely different than anything I have ever seen." That's what they should say.

There are things going on here the likes of which do not go on anywhere else. You see, I think it is the distinctive of the church to be as unlike the world as is possible. Not as much like it as it can be. In fact, we should be so heavenly that there is no comparison, absolutely no comparison.

Now the question is, what goes on in heaven? If we're going to bring heaven down, then the question is, what goes on in heaven that we bring down? And that gives us our five points that make up the skeleton when we answer that question. There are several realities that bring heaven down. May I tell you what they are and then I'll go back and go through them?

Number one, here's what goes on in heaven. The worship of God. Is that true? That goes on in heaven all the time. Secondly, the exaltation of Jesus Christ. That goes on in heaven. Worthy is the Lamb. Thirdly, heaven is characterized, are you ready for this?, by the presence of purity, right? The presence of purity. It's a holy place. Fourthly, what reigns in heaven is the truth, divine truth. And fifthly, spiritual authority. In heaven there is spiritual authority that comes from the throne of God. That's what heaven is like. In heaven you have constant worship of God, constant exaltation of Jesus Christ, the constant presence of purity, the constant reign of the truth, that is to say the Word of God is the beginning and end of everything, and spiritual authority. The application of God's will and God's purpose is dispatched through every agency in heaven and His will is carried out. That's heaven. Heaven is where God is worshiped, Christ is exalted, holiness dominates, truth pervades, and God's will is always done. That's what's going on in heaven.

Now you want to know what the church should do? Just bring it down. If we're going to be heaven on earth, then what are we going to do? We're going to worship God, exalt Christ, pursue holiness, lift up the truth and exercise spiritual authority so that the will of God is done. That's the church. Why would anybody want to make the church like the world?

Well, you say, that will win people over. No it won't because people are won over by the purposes of a sovereign God moving on their heart when they hear the gospel, not by some clever manipulation. And the church sacrificing its own identity for the sake of some imaginary effect has terribly demonstrated its lack of faith in God's purpose, or it's lack of knowledge of His truth, His Word.

All right, let's take point one. What is the church to do? Well, we're to bring heaven down. Well what does heaven do? Well first of all, one thing that's going on in heaven all the time is the worship of God...the worship of God, the exaltation of God. Any look at heaven is going to show you the centrality of God. Whether you get Ezekiel's glimpse in Ezekiel 1, or whether you get John's glimpse in Revelation 4 and 5, as soon as you go into the throne room you see the explosive glory of God sitting on His throne. And all of heaven is doing one thing around that throne, what is it? Worship...worship...worship...worship.

Look at the book of Revelation, we get some glimpses into heaven in the book of Revelation.

Revelation 4:8, the throne of God is described in the early part of the chapter. Verse 2, God sitting on His throne and then it describes the throne. But down in verse 8, the four living creatures who are apparently angelic beings sort of set the tone for heaven. Each one has six wings, are full of eyes around and within and day and night they do not cease to say...now notice that, day and night, they...that means all the time, constantly, unbroken...they do not cease to say, "Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord God, the Almighty who was, who is, who is to come." It's never-ending praise, never-ending praise, always worship, worship, worship, worship, day and night. And the rest of those in heaven, the living creatures, verse 9, the 24 elders, verse 10, they all gather, "Worthy art Thou, O Lord, and our God...our Lord and our God, to receive glory and honor and power for Thou didst create all things and because of Thy will they existed and were created." There is a glimpse into heaven and what is going on is unceasing praise. Chapter 5 verse 13, again every created thing in heaven, on earth, under the earth, on the sea, all things in them. I mean, this is the whole of all conscious rational beings in the universe, and they're all saying to Him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb, "Be blessing and honor and glory and dominion forever and ever." And the four living creatures kept saying, "Amen," and the elders fell down and worshiped. Worship, worship, worship.

You come over to chapter 11 and you find, verse 16, the 24 elders who sit on their thrones before God, fell on their faces and worshiped God saying, "We give Thee thanks, O Lord God, the Almighty



who art and who wast because Thou hast taken Thy great power and hast begun to reign...chapter 15 verse 3, this tremendous worship...great and marvelous are Thy works, O Lord God the Almighty, righteous and true are Thy ways, Thou King of the nation. Who will not fear, O Lord, and glorify Thy name for Thou alone art holy, for all the nations will come and worship before Thee for Thy righteous acts have been revealed." Such is the worship of those saved out of the time of the Tribulation. There's more worship in chapter 19 as well, on into the end of chapter 22 where you have the eternal state filled with worship.

So this is the primary occupation of heaven. Forever and ever and ever we will praise and worship God. That's what goes on in heaven. Now if we are to do on earth what is done in heaven, if we are to bring heaven down, if we are citizens of heaven, if this is the Kingdom and this is where God's will is done, then this is a place of worship.

You say, "Well we know that." Yeah, well it's amazing how many people don't. They have no understanding. They think the church is to be man-centered. They think that somehow the whole objective when we come together is to focus on the people in the pew when the whole objective is to focus on the God on the throne. It is our priority to gather to worship God. If some things we do and say are incomprehensible to the unconverted, so be it. If some things we do and say are offense to the unconverted, then that's how it should be. If it makes them feel left out, it should. We are grateful to have people who don't know Christ, we're grateful that you who don't know the Lord this morning are with us. You are welcome here. But we want you to know that we have gathered to worship the true and the living God, the creator of heaven and earth and all that is in them and the one who redeemed us through the sacrifice of Himself on the cross, the form of Jesus Christ, our Savior and our King and we worship that living God. We are here to worship Him. We're glad that you can eavesdrop on our worship and like those in Corinth who came and experienced that worship and fell on their faces and said, "God is in this place," we hope that you'll do the same. But we're here to worship our God. That's our calling.

In fact, Philippians 3:3 defines us in what I often say is one of my favorite definitions of a Christian. "We are the true circumcision who worship God in the Spirit," or, "Who worship in the Spirit of God." Either translation is possible. We are worshipers. You remember John 4, turn to it for a moment, John chapter 4. You remember that Jesus was having a dialogue with a Samaritan woman, He had confronted her about her sin, reminded her that He knew the whole story though no one had told Him. He knew everything because He was God. And He said, "You have had five husbands. You've managed to shed all of them and now you're living with a man who's not your husband, so you are an adulteress." She was so convicted that she wanted to do what was right and she wanted to get forgiveness and she wanted to go before God and ask for mercy. And she doesn't know where to go because she's a Samaritan and they worship up on Mount Gerizim and Jesus is a Jew and they

worship at Jerusalem. So she says to Him in verse 20, "Where do I go? Our fathers worship in this mountain," Jesus is in Samaria at the time. "Your people say Jerusalem." And her question is really built around the idea "I want to go make my life right but where do I go to worship?" Even she understood that coming to God is an act of worship, praise, falling on your face before God, honoring Him, exalting Him, recognizing Him for who He is and asking for His grace. And that's exactly what happens when a person is saved, they come seeking to worship the true and living God. And He requires that they confess and repent of their sin and respond in faith to His Son as the sacrifice for their sins and He on that basis accepts them as true worshipers.

It is this which the Father seeks. Go down to verse 23, the end of the verse, "Such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers." What kind of people? True worshipers who worship the Father in Spirit and truth. You were saved to be a worshiper. You were saved to be a worshiper. We gather here to worship. We're not here for a success seminar. We're here to worship God. And to worship Him in Spirit, that's why we sing and that's why the music touches your heart and your emotions. And we're here to worship in truth and that's why I read the Scripture and that's why I preach the Word so that you will know your God. But we're here to worship. There's one seeker, everybody talks about seeker services, there's one seeker I'm concerned about and that's the Father who seeks true worshipers and we're here to worship Him. We were saved to be true worshipers. And we must worship Him, verse 24 says, in Spirit, that is with exuberance and joy from the heart and with truth, properly understanding who He is.

God's majesty, God's sovereignty, God's glory, God's holiness must be the supreme concentration of the church. That's why from the first week I came here I called this time on Sundays the fellowship of worship. Everything starts there, absolutely everything starts with exalting God, everything. You cannot even begin to live a godly life unless God is exalted in your heart, unless God is worshiped.

You say, "What do you mean by that?" Well let me tell you what I mean. People in churches everywhere all across the world are starving for something and they don't know what it is. They have no idea what they lack. That's sad. Christians are not given what they lack. They are not given what they need most. They struggle with temptation. They struggle with sin. They struggle with old habits. They struggle with confusion. They struggle with trust. They struggle through their circumstances and suffering. And they hunger but they don't even know what for. And sadly, apparently neither do many of their leaders. But I know what they hunger for. I know what they need.

You say, "What is it?" They need to understand and trust in their God. They need to know the glory of their God. My job and actually the job of every preacher is not to give some moral pep talk, I'm not just trying to fire you up for a few hours and have you go out and try to make it through one day on that hype. I'm not here to give you some psychological boost. I'm not...my job is not to emotionally

stimulate you or to exhort you or to bring you an experience of happiness or some technique for easing your pain. My job is not to help you find the formula to overcome your disappointments or to get better success in the world. Let me tell you what my job is. My job is to give you what you desperately need and what you desperately need and most importantly need beyond anything else is to understand your God. That's what you're starving for, to know God, understanding, believing in the greatness of your God. That is the only cure for sin. And most Christians don't know that.

You say, "What do you mean by that?" Let me put it simply. Sin is what you do when you're not satisfied with God. You grab that point and you're going to get a very important matter settled. Sin is what you do when you're not satisfied with God. And anybody who is not satisfied with God doesn't know Him very well. Cotton Mather, that American in the great Puritan tradition wrote, "The great design and intention of the office of a Christian preacher is to restore the throne and dominion of God in the souls of men." What I see in churches is a diminishing of that and an escalation of all the quick-fix formulas. Peter confirmed this when he wrote, "If anyone speaks, let it be the oracles of God." And I read you earlier from Psalm 63 which you studied last Lord's day and I remind you of that most noble of all desires expressed by the psalmist, "O God, Thou art my God, I shall seek Thee earnestly. My soul thirsts for Thee. My flesh yearns for Thee." Now there are the longings of a godly man expressed.

Preaching is not to be man-centered, it is to be God-centered. And no one is a true preacher who is not preaching the character and nature and revelation of God. "As the deer pants after the water brook, so pants my soul after Thee, O God," said the psalmist. That's it. God should be so desirable that nothing else holds out any promise surpassing the promise of His sweet blessing.

I was preaching last week in this conference and trying to elevate folks maybe who aren't used to hearing great truth preached about God and I preached a message which dealt with some of the greatness of our God and some of the incredible riches and depths of His redeeming purpose. And afterwards a person who knew me said to me, "I asked someone about the message what they thought, someone who is regularly a part of this place and they said, 'Oh that first story was really great but I didn't like the rest of it.'" And I was made aware again of the fact that the reason people doubt the power and value of real God-centered preaching is they are not used to hearing it and it just doesn't connect. That's sad. There is a person groping, struggling with temptation, I can promise you, because not only did they not even know the riches of their God, they're not even interested. That is sad.

Why preach the glory of God? Why exalt God? Why worship God? Why sing His praises? Because holiness is nothing more than a God-centered life. You will be holy, you will be mature, you will be blessed when you know your God and you believe in Him enough to obey Him because you know that's the path to the greatest blessing...prizing God above all else.

Again I say, sin is what you do when your heart is not satisfied with God. Let me spell it out. You sin because sin holds out some better promise than God, at least that's what you believe. Some thrill, some happiness, some satisfaction, some fulfillment, sin holds out some promise that you deem to be more valuable than the promise of God. Well either you don't know the promise of God, you don't know your God, or you don't believe Him because if you know Him and believe Him, you know that sin lies. People are enslaved by sin when they believe God offers them less and that's only because they don't know the greatness of their God, or they don't believe it. When I see somebody in the church or in ministry run off with some woman and destroy his life, destroy his family and his usefulness to the Lord, the tragedy of that is there is a person who believed the promise of sin over the promise of God. How ridiculous is that? You don't know your God very well, or you don't believe Him. Sin is what you do when your heart is not satisfied with Him. And sin will continue to enslave until we believe God is more to be desired than everything else, certainly more to be desired than whatever tempts us. When you believe that Psalm 63:3 says that His loving kindness is better than life, you have a garrison against iniquity. The power of sin's promise is broken by the power of God's promise.

And so, the most powerful motive to holy living is not love or fear or accountability or exhortation. It is knowing and believing in God. It is prizing Him above all else. And as John Piper so wonderfully sums up God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied with Him. God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied with Him.

So what is the church? It's a group of people redeemed by God's grace to be worshipers, to be worshipers. And God must be lifted up and lifted up and lifted up until our hearts are so enamored with Him, so satisfied with Him that nothing else has any competing appeal. That's why the pinnacle of spiritual growth in 1 John is to know Him who is from the beginning because as you come to the full, mature, deep knowledge of the greatness of your God, you will trust His promises. That's really what Paul meant when he talked about the shield of faith. What quenches temptation is trusting in the greatness and the promise of your God. That's the insulation for everything.

Go back to Leviticus 18, let me illustrate this as we close. Leviticus 18, there is a ringing theme and you might do well some time to underline these in your Bible in this section of Scripture, in Leviticus 18 God is going to give instruction to Israel. And the instruction runs for chapters here. But I want you to notice the motive, why they are to obey, 18:1, "Then the Lord spoke to Moses saying, 'Speak to the sons of Israel and say to them, I am the Lord your God.'" That's the heart of everything. Know your God. "You shall not do what is done in the land of Egypt where you live, nor are you to do what is done in the land of Canaan where I'm bringing you. You shall not walk in their statutes. You are to perform My judgments, keep My statutes, live in accordance with them. I am the Lord your God so that you keep My statutes, My judgments by which a man may live if he does them. I am the Lord.

None of you shall approach any blood relative of his to uncover nakedness," that's incest. "I am the Lord," that's why. It goes on like this, a whole list of things in the rest of the chapter.

Comes to verse 30, "Thus keep My charge. Do not practice any of the abominable customs which you...which have been practiced before you as so not to defy yourselves with them. I am the Lord your God." In other words, the motive for everything is understanding the greatness of your God. And in Leviticus 19, "Speak to all the congregation of the sons of Israel. Say to them, 'You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy.'" The end of verse 3, "I am the Lord your God." End of verse 4, "I am the Lord your God." More instruction, end of verse 10, "I am the Lord your God." Verse 12, "I am the Lord." Verse 14, "I am the Lord." Verse 16, "I am the Lord." Verse 18, "I am the Lord." After every injunction, the reason...because I am who I am. Why would you do that? Why would you choose that rather than Me? Verse 25, "I am the Lord your God;" 28, "I am the Lord;" 30, "I am the Lord;" 32, "I am the Lord;" 34, 36, 37. Always the motive.

Over in chapter 20 he sums it up, verse 7, "You shall consecrate yourselves therefore and be holy for I am the Lord your God." And over in verse 24, end of the verse, "I am the Lord your God who has separated you from the peoples." Verse 26, "Thus you are to be holy to Me for I the Lord am holy and I have set you apart from the peoples to be Mine." Come in to 21, it's repeated over and over again, verse 8, "I the Lord who sanctifies you am holy," verse 12, "I am the Lord," verse 15, "I am the Lord," verse 23, "I am the Lord who sanctifies." Come in to 22, it's the same thing repeated, the chapter ends in verse 33 with another one, "I am the Lord." It is so in verse 23...or chapter 23, chapter 24, chapter 25, 26, all these injunctions. I think you get the point. All these injunctions built on the idea of worshiping God. If you understand your God, if you know your God, if you prize your God above everything else. If you worship God supremely, you will be holy.

That's the church, a group of worshipers who come together just like they do in heaven to exalt God. That's why we're here. God's majesty, God's sovereignty, God's holiness and God's glory must be the supreme concentration of the church, that's why we're here. That's what we do. And when you don't do that, you fall into sin. Romans 10, said about the Jews, verse 2, "They have a zeal for God, they have a zeal for God but not in accordance with knowledge." Boy, that is so sad. There are a lot of people in churches today, they have a zeal for God. They really do. They hunger, they just don't know what for. They're never fed. They're never filled. They're never told. They have a zeal for God but not according to knowledge. Verse 3, "Therefore...the Jews' case...they didn't know about God's righteousness." How sad...how tragic! They didn't know how righteous God was and so they foolishly went out to establish their own righteousness. Because they thought God was less righteous than He was, and that they were more righteous than they were, they thought they could meet God on their own human terms and thus were damned by works rather than saved by them.

A lot of people have a zeal for God. But the whole works/righteousness system was based on a low view of God. All sin is. Here we are in the church today when the church is hungry and desperately needs to worship God, desperately needs a high view of God, needs a vision like Isaiah 6 where he saw the glory of God and the holiness of God and Isaiah fell over and was disintegrating, Isaiah 6 says, was falling to pieces and cursing himself because of his iniquity so clearly manifest in the presence of a holy God. And God reached down and touched him. People in churches today need a vision of God. That is desperately required. James said, "Draw near to God and He'll...what?...He'll draw near to you."

Here we are in the church designing what appeals to man, making unbelieving man the one who designs the format...man's felt needs. The evangelical church moving away from God toward man, how sad. It's not new. Go back to Stephen Charnock, one of my favorite writers of the Puritan era. Charnock wrote this in his book *Existence and Attributes of God*, "To pretend a homage to God and intend only the advantage of self is rather to mock Him than worship Him. When we believe that we ought to be satisfied rather than God glorified, we set God below ourselves imagining that He should submit His own honor to our advantage. We make ourselves more glorious than God," end quote. What kind of blasphemy is that? When we believe that we ought to be satisfied rather than God glorified, we set God below ourselves. We don't ever want to do that.

In this century in America, A.W. Tozer, prominent in the forties, said this, and I'm quoting, "In the old days men of faith were said to walk in the fear of God and to serve the Lord with fear. However intimate their communion with God, however bold their prayers, at the base of their religious life was the conception of God as awesome. This idea of God transcendent runs through the whole Bible and gives color and tone to the character of the saints. This fear of God was more than a natural apprehension of danger, it was a dread, an acute feeling of personal insufficiency in the presence of God the Almighty," end quote, from *The Knowledge of the Holy*.

Where is that fear of God? Where is that fear of God? Where is that longing to glorify and honor and exalt God? Through the years that has been a passion of ours. Proverbs 9:10, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." The church today is flippant, irreverent, fails to take God seriously. How sad cause you can't overcome sin unless you prize God above everything.

Well, we come together to worship God. There's only one way to do that and that's the second point. Come back tonight. We're going to talk about the exaltation of Christ.

Father, thank You for our time in Your Word and worship. We trust that our humble worship has pleased You as You please us. You do please us. We prize You more highly than anything. Your

promises are true and more precious than all the lies that sin tells. Help us to know You in all Your fullness so that You can be most glorified in us who are most satisfied with You. In Christ's name. Amen.

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