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

The Job Description of a Faithful Pastor
Scripture: Selected Scriptures
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This is a privilege for me again to be at a Moody Pastors' Conference. It's been a few years. Through the years now and then I've had the opportunity to come here. The first Pastors' Conference I ever attended, I attended here at Moody, many, many years ago, I was a very young pastor and I needed some refreshment and I took the train to Chicago with a friend because I wanted to do some work and do some writing, and if I figured if I had a prolonged period of time I could do that. I got here, snuck in the back and I actually had a Micky Mouse T-shirt on, I'm loyal to Southern California, you know, Disneyland. So I had a Micky Mouse T-shirt on because I was going to bail out and go back and catch a train. And somehow, Dr. Sweeting called on me and I may be the only person certainly in his tenure who led the Pastors' Conference in prayer in a Mickey Mouse T-shirt. So one of my memories from my wonderful days at Moody Bible Institute.

I don't really need to preach a sermon to you. I really don't want to do that, I'm not going to do that. I just want to talk to you a little bit from my heart, if I can. I want this more to be just a personal time. I want to let my own heart respond to the prompting, I trust, of the Lord as we think about some things.

My favorite people on the planet are pastors. I love pastors. I think I understand you. I've been at this a long time. I grew up in a Pastor's family, my dad was a pastor my whole life. He preached until he was 90 years, went to heaven a few years ago at 91. He stopped when he kept repeating the same point over and over and over again. And somebody said, “I think you're done,” and they were right. So I tell the guys at the church, “When I don't make sense, get me out of there. As long as I make sense, leave me there.” The problem is, I won't know when I don't make sense, so they'll have a little resistance. But...(Laughter)

But I grew up in a pastor's home, my granddad was a pastor, I was surrounded by pastors and I grew up loving...loving men of God, I grew up loving pastors, and I grew up influenced by good, godly, faithful pastors who loved what they did and lived lives of honor and integrity before the Lord. So I had such high elevated views of what it was to be a pastor, my dad gave me that great legacy for which I'm so profoundly indebted. And I still have a great affection for pastors. And one of the things that I'm committed to doing any way that I possibly can from my little vantage point, Southern California, is to extend the reach of our church and our ministry as far as we can across the planet to help pastors, to provide anything and everything we can for them in whatever language, whatever

culture, whatever country they serve. So it's just a great privilege for me to be with you.

And my heart aches for pastors these day, it really does, because it's seemingly more difficult now than it was in past years. We live in an anti-authority culture, we live in a culture that has lost all respect for people in positions of influence and authority. It's tear down everybody, tear down everything. It's a destructive culture and it's hard for us to survive in that because even our churches are filled...it seems to me that this is the age of Diotrephes, people want to rise to have the preeminence. You know, they've been fed a steady diet of you should have your way, this is a self-esteem kind of mentality, and you should get what you want and your opinions are equal to everybody else's. And I know it's challenging. Very few guys are bolted out of churches because of a poor sermon. They usually run out because of conflict with somebody who struggles to be in the power. And I know it's a challenging thing. And I know there is not only that kind of intimidation, but there's the intimidation of all the internet pastors, all the big media pastors, all the big church pastors, and it can be very, very intimidating. You get discouraged because you don't have more people, or your church isn't growing. You go to some seminar and somebody gives you a bag of tricks how to get more people, and books are written about how to increase your numbers. And you go to another seminar and somebody tells you how to impact your culture and how to penetrate your community, and how to come up with this program and that problem...that program so you can reach beyond the church and grasp the culture and revolutionize the culture., and pastors get beleaguered with this stuff, they get discouraged with this. It's all intimidation. It really is, and it's really off the point of what we do, and I want to tell you what the point is as simply as I can.

If you're a pastor, you have one job...you have one job. It's this, Shepherd the flock of God among you....that's your job. You are not a cultural evangelist, you are not a society penetrator, you're not an entrepreneur, you're not a revolutionary, you are a feeder of the flock of God.

Jesus said:

“I will build My church and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it.”

“All whom the Father chose will be called.”

“All who are called will come.”

“All who come will be received by Christ.”

“All whom Christ receives, He will keep. All whom He keeps, He will raise at the last day.”

Our job is to feed His sheep. And the day you move your eyes beyond the people sitting in your church who belong to Christ, that's the day you just lost your purpose.

Turn to 1 Peter and what I want to do, 1 Peter 5, is just look at some Scripture with you. Can we do that? Have a little Bible study, kind of like we're hanging around in the den somewhere? If you're looking for an outline, you won't find one. This is 1 Peter, and I think by the time Peter wrote his epistles, he sort of sorted it all out. He had a little bit of difficulty finding his way. But he had an experience with Jesus in John chapter 21 verses 15 to 17 in which Jesus restored him from his tragedy, right?

By the way, a planned strategy was Peter's denial. God planned to fit it into His purposes. How do we know that? Because of Luke chapter 22, Jesus said to Peter, “Satan desires to have you that he may sift you.”

Now if I had been Peter, I would have said...”Well you told him no, right?” And like Job, the Lord said, “I told him yes.” Because when you're converted, you're going to be able to strengthen the brothers. And it is that same Peter who was confronted by Jesus after his horrible failure in John 21 in Galilee and Jesus says to him, “Do you love Me? Do you love Me? Do you love Me? If you do, feed My sheep. Feed My sheep. Feed My sheep.” How complicated is that?

Listen to 1 Peter 5:1, “Therefore, I exhort the elders among you,” that would be us, right? “As your fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed.” He's got some credentials, right? He saw the suffering of Christ and he also saw the transfiguration, previews of the Second Coming, as a real Apostle and companion of Christ. “I exhort you with those kinds of credentials and that kind of direct line form Christ Himself, verse 2, feed the flock of God among you.”

The focus of our ministry is not on the people outside the church. The focus of our ministry is the people inside the church. It's not the unbelievers that come to church, it's the believers who are the church. Shepherd or feed the flock of God among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but voluntarily according to the will of God, or according, literally, to God. This is God's plan. If you're a pastor, you are a shepherd of the flock of God. It's that basic. This is our mandate. We're not called to the culture. We're not called to the unconverted. We are called to the redeemed. We are called to the church, the elect, the justified and we're called to be two things, their sanctifier and their protector and they go together.

Another passage that addresses this, and these are things that I know are very familiar to you, I just want to refocus a little. Ephesians 4, very familiar words. “He gave some as apostles, some as prophets,” that would be chronological, the age of the Apostles and Prophets have passed, right? Ephesians 2:20, they were the foundation. And they have been replaced by evangelists and then pastor/teachers. And what is the purpose? For the equipping of the saints. Here again that very, very familiar verse which is establishing for us the mandate of what we do. We are equippers of the saints

so the saints can do the work of service, so the body can be built up, the body of Christ, to bring all of us to the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ. Simply said, men, here is our responsibility. It is to feed the flock of God so that they can grow into Christ's likeness. The measure of any man's ministry is not the number in his congregation, it is the Christ likeness of his congregation. It's not about how many you have, it's about how Christlike they are. That's what you've been called to do. That's what a pastor is. That's what a shepherd is. That's our calling. And I'm really grieved that we've lost that in so many places, in so many ways.

Turn to Acts chapter 20 as we sort of complete some foundational scriptures in our thinking tonight. Acts chapter 20, Paul is meeting here with the elders from the Ephesian church and he's meeting with them at Miletus which was a seaport not far away, and they come there to be with him. And he says this to them, verse 26, “I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all men...I'm innocent of the blood of all men.” What an amazing statement that is. “For I didn't shrink from declaring to you the whole purpose of God.”

Paul said, “Look, I have fully discharged my ministry, by doing...what?...By declaring to you believers the whole purpose of God.” And then he passes the responsibility on, verse 28, “Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock.”

There are two aspects of life in ministry...myself and my flock. Be on guard for yourself and for your flock. That is the milieu in which we live and minister. And then he follows it up by saying, “Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers.” And again he brings in the fact that part of this shepherding is to...is to oversee your flock, to care for your flock. That can't be done in a media ministry. That's a very personal and intimate expression of responsibility, to shepherd the church of God. And if you have any question about how important it is to do that, remember this, He purchased it with...what?...His own blood.

I mean, if somebody put something really precious in your hands, you feel responsible, right? My wife bent her wedding...or her engagement ring that I got her. I improved it through the years. The first one you needed a magnifying glass to find the diamond and it's a pretty nice one that I got on a missionary trip to South Africa one time, and it was mangled. And so I said, “I'll take it by the place and get it fixed.” I'm telling you, I got a long lecture about the responsibility that I now had for this thing that was in my hand. Actually when the speech was over, I gave it back and said, “You take it.” I understand somebody being concerned with something precious put into my trust.

There's never been anything more precious than the church which Christ purchased with His own blood and it's been put in your trust and your objective and your calling and your duty and your mandate is to take that church that is your responsibility, the flock of God among you, and nurture them into Christ's likeness.

Do you understand what a horrendous confession it is for somebody to say “We have failed to disciple the people of God?” Do you understand what a horrendous thing it is to say, “We have not fed the flock? We have not taught the people, we now recognize that?” That is a complete disregard for the one function that is the function of a pastor. That's all there is. “Feed and protect. Feed and protect. Shepherd and guard those whom the Lord has given to you.”

I want you to look at John 17 as we sort of accumulate some of these passages. In John 17 which is the Holy of Holies of the New Testament, Jesus' high priestly prayer with the Father. We really get into the heart of Christ. I kept hearing the worship leader say, “Listen for the heart of God...Listen in your heart to hear God speak.” Well right here in John 17 you have the heart of Christ. You don't have to wait for it, it's here. Listen to what it is. This is what He wants, verse 12. He's praying to the Father, “While I was with them, I was keeping them in Your name which You have given Me.”

Now that, my friend, is really a pastoral act. You gave them, I keep t hem. I guarded them, not one of them perished except the one who was destined to perish, the son of perdition as the Scripture predicted.

But in verse 13, our Lord says, “Now I come to you,” He's anticipating the Ascension, return to heaven. “These things I speak in the world so that they may have My joy made full in themselves. I have given them Your Word.” There again, protecting and feeding, protecting and feeding, that's the model of pastoral ministry. I've given them Your Word, that's the feeding, and the world has hated them because they're not of the world, even as I am not of the world. I do not ask You to take them out of the world, but to keep them from the evil one, they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world.” And here's the Lord great prayer for His own, “Sanctify them,” right? “Sanctify them in the truth, Your Word is truth.”

Verse 19, He repeats it. “For their sakes I sanctify Myself that they themselves also may be sanctified in truth.” The goal that the Lord has in His heart, the desire of the head of the church, the Lord of the church, the Lord Jesus Christ is that His sheep be sanctified.

What I really want to help you to refocus on is I would just be...blessed in my heart if we capture one thing out of this. You've been called, we've all been called, I've been called to be a sanctifying shepherd...a sanctifying shepherd. The issue is not how broadly can I pick into the culture and entertain people who are not believers. The issue that defines your ministry is how committed you are to the sanctification of your flock.

You say, “Well wait a minute. I know you're already asking the question...what about evangelism? What about evangelism?” Believe me, Christlike people have a powerful impact in the world. “Let your light so shine before men that they may see your entertainment and glorify your Father who is in

heaven?”

“Let me see your...what?...your good works.” The power of a righteous life. As one German philosopher said, “Show me your redeemed life and I might believe there is a Redeemer.” I mean, it's just basic.

So He expresses His petition, “Sanctify them in the truth. Your Word is truth.” That says it. You want to be a sanctifying shepherd? You want to feed the flock of God? You have one book, right? One book. Can't take away from it, can't add to it, it's all here. So you sanctify the flock in the truth and the Word is the truth.

By the way, I want to give you a little bit of a warning on this. Look at Hebrews 13 and verse 7, familiar verses. It refers again to pastors, verse 7, “Remember those who led you and those who led you, did...what?...spoke what?....the Word of God to you.” And then over in verse 17, “Obey your leaders and submit for they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account.”

That's what we're accountable to God for. It's not going to be, “Hey, well done, good and faithful servant, you had 3,000.” It's not going to be that. It's going to be whether or not we kept careful spiritual watch over their souls so they were not tossed to and fro and carried about by every wind of doctrine. So they were not content in their selfish sins, so that they were desirous of humility, not content with their own pride and self-will, so that they were godly, so they were Christlike.

I mean, this is a big challenge, isn't it? When you go to a church, one question, “Lord, help me to feed this flock in such a way that I both protect them and nourish them and move them ever increasingly into the image of Jesus Christ.

You say, “What about the non-believers?” Oh, they can eavesdrop. They can sneak in the back and watch you do that. But every time you stand up before the flock, you have the responsibility to shepherd that flock, to feed that flock. And it's amazing how the Christlike congregation has a powerful impact and a passion to witness. We need to refocus then on the...well the very obvious, actually, the very obvious.

Let me just take it a step further. Other verses are jumping in my head here. Second Timothy 3, and again I'm trying to pile this on you a little bit. “All Scripture,” verse 16, familiar, right? “All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness so that...who can be adequate?...the man of God, complete, equipped for every good work.”

Let me tell you something. The foundation of all ministry in the church is the equipping of the saints, this parallels Ephesians 4, is the perfecting of the man of God, his training in righteousness, instruction, correction, all of that, through the Word of God and that limits that to believers...it's limited

to believers. So when you follow up, and I'll show you that in a minute, in chapter 4 verse 1, “I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and Christ Jesus who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing in the Kingdom, preach the Word.” The assumption is that that's talking about what you do in the church. That's not talking about evangelism. You preach the Word in season and out of season, reprove, rebuke, exhort with great patience and instruction. That can't be for non-believers because the natural man understands not the things of God. To him they are foolishness.

However, even believers, according to verse 3, will have a struggle enduring sound doctrine. Do you question that? Is not the church full of people who resent sound doctrine? Many of them are believers and they want to have their ears tickled and they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires and will turn away their ears from the truth, and turn aside to myths. Paul is talking to Timothy about a ministry he wants Timothy to discharge in the church. It's the same calling. It's the exact same calling. In the church you take the Word of God which is inspired by God in every Word, *pas graphe,* all scripture and you teach it and you use it to reprove and correct and train in righteousness with the man of God in view, to bring that person to maturity and godliness and sanctification. You reprove, rebuke, exhort with patience and instruction, even those in the congregation who have a disdain for sound doctrine...just want to have their ears tickled.

You say, “You mean to tell me that even believers have a resistance to the Word of God? Ha? Have you not experienced that? Let me show you another scripture, I like doing Bible study, you probably know that. I don't really have anything to say any way, the Lord does, but turn to John 8, this is one of those really definitive passages that sometimes gets overlooked. “All Scripture is for the saints,” would you agree with that? Would you agree with that? “ll Scripture is written for the saints, because the natural man, 1 Corinthians 2:14, cannot understand it. It is foolishness to him.” This is what our Lord says here. Verse 43, “Why do you not understand what I'm saying? It is because you...what's the next word?...what is it?...cannot.” You can't.

You hear people say, “You don't want to go into the pulpit and do Bible exposition, non-believers won't understand that. Right? Of course they won't understand it. But the church service of worship and instruction is not for the unbeliever. Of course they won't understand it. They can't understand it.

If you're going to decide that the focus of your church is going to be on unbelievers, I would agree, take the Bible out. Find something they'll buy into. It won't be the Scripture. But if you're talking about the saints, you start to give them a steady, unrelenting, deep understanding of the Word of God and their lives will change and their love for the truth will grow and grow and grow and grow and so will they.

And then our Lord says this, verse 45, “Because I speak the truth, you don't believe Me.” You don't understand it and you don't believe it. Verse 47, “He who is of God hears the Words f God.” For this reason, you do not hear because you're not of God.

One of the things that will happen in your church when you really become relentless at teaching the Word of God is, you'll find out who the non-believers are. They'll resent it, they'll fight it and they'll leave. They can't, they won't, they don't. Seven times in that little passage I read the word “not” is there. They cannot understand. They cannot hear. They do not believe. They do not hear because they are not of God. What we do know is that the Word of God in the power of the Word of God is the sanctifying tool for the church. And we are by calling sanctifiers, we are sanctifying shepherds. Scripture is the single indispensable truth that sanctifies, nothing else...nothing else. It's the only source for growth and holiness, 1 Peter 2, right? “Like a baby desires milk, desire the Word that you may grow.”

Scripture can be understood, believed, received and applied only by believers. So I'm not surprised if you decided you're going to turn your church into an evangelistic center and draw in all kinds of unbelievers, that you're not going to use t he Bible, cause you're liable to have an empty place real fast. But then again, what is your calling? In the middle of that mass of unbelievers you have a few starving true believers that you're not shepherding? The very term “pastor” means shepherd, *poimen*. I understand that unbelievers resent the Scripture. I've been out there with them enough. Why is the Word of God so strongly and universally opposed in the world? Why? Because non-Christians by nature, by disposition are hostile to divine truth. They're the enemies of God and therefore they are the enemies of the God revealed in Scripture. They're all enemies of God. They're all therefore enemies of holy Scripture which is the revelation of God. It is perhaps amazing that even the Old Testament Jews, resented, hated and rejected divine revelation which was given to them. They actually murdered the prophets who brought it. And they were the people of God.

You have to understand, there's a controlling, dominating, irresistible sinful force in the heart that makes response to Scripture unnatural, alien. Because I tell you the truth, John 8:44, you don't believe me. There is tis dominating force, this natural hostility that's the essence of fallenness. The truth will always be resisted even among those who purport to be religious. Just watch, for example, the History Channel and see what they do to the New Testament events and the person of Jesus Christ, or the Discovery Channel. The History Channel called and said, “We would like you to come on and be on the of the regular contributing experts to our discussions of biblical literature.” I responded, “No way, I'm not going to be included in the ship of fools who are misinterpreting, misrepresenting, misunderstanding the Word of God. (Applause) And I don't ever go on any those kinds of programs where they can edit me, because I don't know what I'm going to come out saying. (Laughter).

But the bottom line is this. This warfare against Scripture is not academic, it is sinful and satanic. Fallen man's thoughts naturally correspond to the thoughts not of God, but the thoughts of Satan. Back to John 8 verse 44, “You're of your father the devil who is a liar and has been from the beginning.”

People outside the church, the true church, resent the Scripture. They resent its narrowness. They resent its authority. They resent its commands. That's one of the reasons liberalism or the contemporary version of it in the Emerging Church, or whatever, come up with a way to dismiss the Bible. Well, it's not inspired. Well, it's not clear. Whatever it is. That's not academically motivated, that is sinfully motivated, that is the natural propulsion of the force of iniquity that is human fallenness. It hates God. It hates the Scripture. It will create another God but not the true and living God. All resistence to Scripture truth is sinful and satanic as to its motives.

Now listen, when people become saved, when we became saved now that we know Christ, we still have remaining sin, don't we? Right? You all live in Romans 7 like I do. “The things I want to do I don't do. The things I don't want to do, I do, O wretched man that I am.” Right? You're there, we're all there. We have not attained, right? But we press toward the mark, Philippians 3.

I know in my own fallen heart there is still a residual, resistance to Scripture. There are commands in Scripture that I would like occasionally to violate. Right? I still, and I'm so thankful for the companionship of the Apostle Paul, my hero, I still have to beat my body to bring it into submission because of remaining sin. And part of remaining sin is resistance to Scripture. It's resistance to the rule and reign of holiness in my life. How am I going to sanctify a congregation? How am I going to be a sanctifying shepherd? It's impossible with the world. It's possible with the church, but it's not easy because there's still persistent resentment toward holy Scripture, toward obedience and personal sanctification. So what do I need to do?

Well, let me give you some principles. I think I have a few minutes. If I want to be a sanctifying shepherd, what do I need to understand? I already know the means of that sanctification is the Word of God empowered by the Spirit of God, right? And nothing else does it, agreed? Nothing else. So what do I need to do?

First of all, I need to make sure doctrinally that I assault every vestige of satanic lies and deception. Second Corinthians...look at 2 Corinthians 10 and I mentioned this in a little session we had in the afternoon but I want to mention it again. You hear people talk about spiritual warfare and sometimes, you know, that means chasing demons around and you might as well forget doing that. They don't have to obey you and me and anybody else since the Apostles. And if you wonder about that, remember what the demons said to the sons of Sceva, Jesus we know and Paul we know, but who are you guys? So in 2 Corinthians 10:3, we walk in the flesh...that doesn't mean we're carnal, that means we're human in this context. We're human but we don't war according to the flesh, we don't use human weapons, okay? We don't use human weapons. You can't win the battle, you can't win the battle of sanctification with human weapons. The weapons of our warfare can't be human, they have to be divinely powerful. They have to be so powerful they can destroy fortresses. They have to be powerful enough...and the word “fortress” means that, fortress, massive, granite, stone fortresses. We

have to have some kind of powerful, powerful weapon to smash fortresses.

Now what are the fortresses in which people hide? Well the next verse describes that. Verse 4, “Divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses,” then it immediately repeats without the first two words in the NAS, it repeats it immediately, “Destruction of fortresses, comma, destroying speculations.” So the fortresses are immediately defined as speculations. The word is *logismos*, ideas...ideas, concepts, thoughts, viewpoints, perspectives. We want to destroy ideas.

What kind of ideas are we trying to destroy? “Every...every lofty, even every, *kai*is even, even every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God.” Now what kind of ideas are we trying to destroy? Every ungodly idea...any ungodly idea, any remnant of satanic deception, any wrong concept of God, Christ, salvation, man's sin, right? This is all about the mind. Sanctification is not the result of an emotional experience. Sorry, you can sway back and forth and sing till you're purple and that's not going to sanctify you. What is going to sanctify you is when you think correctly and those thoughts that you now understand become convictions and they move from being convictions to being affections. And you go from knowing the truth to embracing the truth, to loving the truth. That's what sanctifies you.

So the first responsibility for those of us who are sanctifying shepherds, is to make sure we banish the vestiges of satanic deception. You say, “Well does doctrine matter?” You bet. You bet it matters because every wrong doctrine hinders real sanctification. And you can't be Christlike unless you have the mind of Christ. And that's not mystical, that's actual knowledge.

You say, “How am I going to get the mind of Christ?” You're going to get the mind of Christ by learning what He revealed in here about how He thinks. So, first thing is to smash all lofty elevated concepts that are anti-God, and then the end of verse 5, “And taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ.

Some people say, “Ah, you don't want to go to church and preach doctrine.” Oh yes you do. You've got to smash wrong thinking. People don't live right lives with wrong thoughts, that doesn't happen. “As a man thinks in his heart, so he is.”

So the first thing you do is smash the deceptions. And the Word of God is the tool for that, isn't it, because all Scripture is inspired and it makes the man of God complete.

And then verse 6 adds a nice little footnote, “And we're ready to punish all disobedience.” Enforce it. If you find a man in your church who is a heretic, what do you do? Rebuke him two times, and then what? Hit the highway. Every church is defined by the Apostle Paul to Timothy as the pillar and ground of the truth. Your church should be a bastion of biblical truth, biblical clarity, doctrinal strength where your people think biblically because they therefore think like Christ thinks. I want to think like

He does about man, about sin, about God, about the Spirit, about himself, about history, about the beginning, about creation, about consummation, about marriage, about love, about everything. I want His thoughts to be my thoughts. I know the Old testament says, “My thoughts are not your thoughts and my ways are not your ways, but that's been marvelously mitigated in the unfolding progress of revelation so that the rest of the Scripture has filled in a whole lot of the gaps and there's plenty in here for me to know enough to know how Christ thinks so that I can begin to think like Christ and therefore become as much like Christ as I can in this life.

The most important thing you could ever do in your church is to give your people the thoughts that are the thoughts of God revealed on the pages of Holy Scripture. And then the second thing is to lead them to holiness...to lead them to holiness.

In...I think we may have time to look at this. Second Corinthians 6, leading people to holiness is a very challenging thing. But that's going to be the measure of your ministry. You're a steward, right? Paul says, you're a steward, 1 Corinthians 4, and you have a stewardship to discharge. One day, he says, the Lord's going to bring all things to light, right? And what He's going to bring to light is the level of faithfulness of the stewardship...steward of the mysteries of God to be dispensed to the church. And you have to go through the path that I've just given you dispelling all bad and deceptive lies, and then you have to pursue the path of righteousness with a vengeance.

For example, in chapter 6 verse 14, “Don't be bound together with unbelievers.” That's generic, isn't it? Don't get into any common adventure on behalf of Christ and the church with unbelievers, that doesn't protect your flock. What are you going to do? Open the door of the sheepfold and invite the wolves? You better be a protector of the people. And, of course, what partnership has righteousness and lawlessness, and what fellowship has light with darkness?

Paul's not talking about marriage here, it certainly applies to that. Paul is talking about any kind of common spiritual enterprise, any kind of invasion into the church. What agreement has the temple of God with idols?

And chapter 7 verse 1, “Having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.”

Perfecting holiness in the fear of God. Look at chapter 11, 2 Corinthians 11, you're familiar, you've probably preached on all these passages, but just pulling them together for you a little bit. Verse 2, “I'm jealous for you.” What do you want for your church? What do you really want? “I'm jealous of you with a godly jealousy. I've betrothed you to one husband so that to Christ I might present you as a...what?...pure virgin.”

Isn't that what we should be doing? Don't you want to give your church to Christ in the day that He comes as a pure virgin?

“But I'm afraid,” he says, verse 3, “As a serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your minds will be led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ.”

Men, I will tell you this, give your people Christ, give them Christ, give them Christ, and never stop giving them Christ because they're not going to be like Him unless they really understand Him and know Him.

I've preached now for 40 years and the theme of the preaching for the most of those years has been Christ, for sure. Several years in the gospel of John, eight years in Matthew, ten years in Luke, so that's 20 years out of 40 in three gospels. Every Sunday Christ, every Sunday Christ, every Sunday Christ. And then there's Revelation and I've gone through Revelation enough times that it takes up another four years. And I've gone through Hebrews and enough time that it takes up another year. And I've gone through Romans and everything in Romans points to the glory of the sacrifice and the atonement of Jesus Christ and you just preach Christ and preach Christ. He's the most compelling, the most riveting, the most fascinating, the most marvelous, the most glorious person you'll ever speak about in your pulpit. And that is why Paul says, “I am determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified.” And that's why Paul says, “We do not preach ourselves.” Don't exegete your own ideas, we preach Christ. He's the theme of Scripture. He's the theme of Scripture. The gospels tell his story. The book of Acts tells the story of the spread of the gospel, and the epistles describe the significance of His atoning work and the book of Revelation is the consummation in His return and His ever-lasting reign.

Preach Christ. I preached 20 years of the gospel and I finished Luke, and I said to the people, “We are now going to do Mark.” One Sunday we ended Luke, a few weeks later we started Mark. And the place was jammed and the people were so excited and so thrilled because you could never get enough of Him.

I commend to you, men, dig into a gospel and Sunday after Sunday, after Sunday, let Christ dominate the thinking of your people. Why? Look at Galatians 4:19. You want to...you want to tell your congregation sometime what you want, borrow the words of Paul. Galatians 4:19, “My children, my children, with whom I am again in labor,” it's the Greek word for birth pain, female birth pain. “I am in labor until Christ is informed in you.” That's when you can rest and that's probably not going to happen...not fully formed.

What fully satisfies you? A crowd, occupied seats. Paul says, “I never finish, it's never birth, it's just endless pain until Christ is fully formed in you.” Now that's the cry of a sanctifying shepherd.

Now all of that is pretty positive, isn't it? So let me be a little negative. Matthew 18, for those of you who may not feel the full weight of this, I'll give you Matthew 18. The eighteenth chapter of Matthew is a single sermon, probably preached in Peter's house in Capernaum. And Jesus picks up a little child, verse 2, probably a very small child. And this child is an illustration of the believer, okay? And he says in verse 3, “Truly I say to you, unless you're converted and become like children, you don't enter the Kingdom of heaven.” So the child is the illustration. It's not a sermon about children, it's a sermon about believers who are like children, and we're all like children.

So He says, “You enter the Kingdom like children.” What does that mean? You have no achievement to offer, right? Children have no accomplishments. They've done nothing to merit honor or reward, they are dependent. They are weak. They're impotent, powerless, can't sustain their own life. That's how you come into the Kingdom...impotent, powerless, with nothing to offer. That's how you come in. Verse 4 defines it, about humbling yourself. You come to salvation in humility. And then whoever receives one such child in My name, receives Me.

Every time you open your arms and embrace one of the Lord's children, a believer, you receive Him, right? First Corinthians, “He that is joined to the Lord is one Spirit.” “I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live, yet not I, but Christ.” I don't know where I'd begin and Christ...or I end and Christ begins, or Christ lives in me and when I come to you, Christ comes to you, right? So how you treat another believer is how you treat Christ. That's what he's saying.

And then in verse 6 comes this very strong statement. “Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me,” this is not...this is not child molestation, this is now about how you treat a baby, everybody loves babies. This is how you treat a believer. Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to stumble...” Wow, that's pretty tight, isn't it? “It would be better for him to have a heavy millstone hung around his neck and be drowned in the depth of the sea.” Wow. I mean, I remember James 3:1, “Stop being so many teachers for theirs is a greater condemnation.” Why? “Because whoever doesn't offend with his tongue is a perfect man, so you know you're going to offend with your tongue and you're going to have a greater condemnation.” This takes it a step farther. If you're going to cause another believer to stumble into sin, you'd be better off to die a horrible death by drowning.

By the way, that's the first chapter to give instruction to the church in the Bible, and it starts with this frightening thought. What does it mean to stumble? To stumble into sin. When I say you're the protector and the feeder, this is what we're talking about. You're a sanctifying shepherd and a protector, and what are you protecting them from? False doctrine and sin. Spurgeon said, “I solemnly charge you never say a word or be the means of leading another person into sin. If we sin alone, it's bad enough. If we sin in company, we have not only to answer for our sins, but for the sins of others. There is multiplication of guilt increased by the transgression of the other sinners.

I don't know about you, but I've got enough to deal with with my own sins, I don't want to be responsible for leading others into sin, they are the guilt of that. Spurgeon went on to say, “I know ministers who were tempters of others. Their speech was full of double entendre, insinuation, innuendos which were almost worse than profanity and such can defile a whole parish.”

So you lead your people to sound doctrine, and you lead your people to sanctification, to holiness. Now I'll just close with this, you can...you can follow it up a little bit.

A sanctifying...as a sanctifying shepherd, I have to recognize certain things. One, I recognize the power of the flesh...I recognize the power of the flesh. I recognize that those dear precious people sitting out in front of me still have the flesh and there are strong powerful impulses coming from the flesh. I'm never going to willingly, knowingly, God-help-me, be a source in feeding that impulse. I'm not going to get near anything that panders to their flesh. I don't want anyone coming into the service, coming in under the shepherd and the feeder and sanctifier of the flock of God, I don't want anybody coming in there and having me be the tempter. I understand the power of the flesh and I understand that I have to walk in a holy path and talk in a holy way. I also understand the power of the world. I also understand the power of the world. When somebody walks out of the world and into the church, I want to leave the world outside. I don't need to bother their illustrations. I don't need to borrow their movies. I don't need to borrow their music, I don't need any of it. I don't need any of it.

I want the environment to change dramatically. I want them to walk in to a holy place. I want...I want to speak to them of heaven, not earth, of God, not men. I understand the power of the world, I don't want them to love the world. I don't want them to think I love the world, or that I'm overly familiar to the world. Hey, friendship with the world is...what?...enmity with God, James 4:4, “Love not the world, neither the things in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, the pride of life and all those in the world. It's all going to perish.

In Titus, Paul told Titus, I think its's very important for us to remember, chapter 2 of Titus, “For the grace of God has appeared...verse 11...bringing salvation to all men, instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age.” You've got to understand the world is powerful. You don't need to use it, you need to separate your people from it when they step into the realm of Holy Scripture.

Understand the power of the flesh, understand the power of the world, and, thirdly, understand the power of Satan that he goes around like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Pray like Jesus did, “Father, I'm not asking You to take them out of the world, I'm asking ou to keep them from the evil one.” First John 5:19, “The whole world lies in the lap of the evil one.” Second Corinthians 2:11, Paul says, “We don't want Satan to get an advantage of us.” I see myself in this sanctifying role on this negative side as being a protector from pandering to anything that's lustful, from pandering to

anything that's characteristically, from pandering to anything that would draw Satan in or give him an opportunity. The sanctifying shepherd gives his life to strength and protect his beloved flock from these powerful forces.

On the positive side, and I'll leave this with you cause my time is gone. A sanctifying shepherd recognizes the power of Scripture, right? The power of Scripture. Isaiah 66:1 and 2, “Who is the Lord looking for?” Those who tremble at His Word. And He recognizes the power of the Spirit and He tells His people to walk in the Spirit and they will not fulfill the lust of the flesh, right? Romans 8, Galatians 5, Ephesians 5. He understands the power of prayer. He understands that above all the armor, Paul says, and on top of everything, prayer. Pray without ceasing. And He Himself is committed to pray as well as administer the Word. He understands the power of confrontation.

I cannot tell you, men, this is critical in the life of the church. You cannot preach against sin and do nothing about it when it is evident. That's why the discipline passage is in Matthew 18. That's why Paul says in 2 Corinthians 12 and 13, I'm coming and when I confirm your sin between two or three witnesses, it's because that's established by our Lord, I'm going to deal with you. That's why he says to the Corinthians, “You decide, I'm coming, do I come with a rod or do I come in meekness?” You decide.

So, if you're going to be a sanctifying shepherd, you understand the power of the Word, you understand the power of the Spirit, you understand the power of confrontation. And finally, you understand the power of example...the power of example. “Be ye followers of me as I am of Christ.”

I can't tell you, men, it's so important, the integrity of your life, Hebrews 13:7 again, where we were a minute ago. “Follow their faith.” Paul says, “Follow me, I'm following Christ.” The power of example. Paul says, “Timothy, be an example of the believers, right? In everything, purity, faithfulness, righteousness.

And what is the goal of all this? It is Christ's likeness. It is Christ's likeness. And, man, at the end of everything, when our day in ministry is done, the measure of our ministry will be the Christlikeness of the flock.

Father, we thank You for the time tonight and this week. We really rejoice in this high, holy calling, but we feel the weight of it, feel the weight of it. And even when we've done our best and given all that we have to give, we have to say, as indicated in Luke 17, we are unworthy servants who have only done what we ought to have done. And may we not grow weary in this well-doing, but make us faithful. May we never measure our ministry in numbers, or anything external. May we learn to measure our ministry in regard to our own personal faithfulness and holiness and the Christlikeness of our flock. Help us to feed Your flock, the flock You purchased with Your own blood. And when the Great Shepherd, the Chief Shepherd appears, we will receive the unfading crown of glory. Thank You, Lord,

for such a promise, what a promise. We bless You. Amen and Amen. (Applause)

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