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

Characteristics of a True Church, Part 2
Scripture: Selected Scriptures
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Now as we continue to talk about the church, I want to kind of go back to some basics, and I started that last week. I read you a little list of about a dozen things that characterized the life of the church, and we're trying to help you understand the church. Many, many new people; we've had a show of hands in recent weeks about how many of you have been here in the last year or so or two years, and it's really amazing how many folks the Lord has brought into our church recently. And it's important for us to know you and it's important for you to know us. It's important for us together to understand the church and what distinguishes the church.

And I want to say, as I've said many times through the years, I love the church. It is the only institution that our Lord said He would build and bless. It is the one work of God in the world--the one redeeming work of God in the world through Christ is the establishing and building of the church. We started in Matthew where Jesus said, "I will build My church and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it." We love the church and we want the church to be the church in terms of its biblical definition. The church, as we have learned, is chosen by God. It is a gathering of people who confess Jesus as Lord, who come together to worship God, to worship Christ, empowered by the Holy Spirit.

The church is the most precious thing that God possesses on earth. It is heaven come down. The church is precious because it was purchased by the blood of Christ. It is the earthly expression of heaven. It is the dwelling place of the Trinity. We are the temple of God. The church is the caretaker of the truth, as we saw last week, the pillar and support of the truth. The church is the purveyor of the gospel, the only message that saves sinners from eternal judgment. The church is salt and light, having a preserving effect on the society around it. The church is the sole instrument of evangelism in this age. The church is the communion of saints which gives testimony to the power of the gospel by its joy and blessing and transformation as the watching world views it. The church is this distinct group of redeemed people in the world and the world is hostile to the church, but the world desperately needs the church, it is its only hope because it is the church that proclaims the message of salvation.

Now as we look a little more closely at the church, we sorted out some distinguishing marks of the church. Each of these could be a study and perhaps should be in itself, but we started last week with the first one, that the church is distinguished by its commitment to the absolute authority of Scripture…the absolute authority of Scripture. I would suggest that if you weren't here last Sunday night, you might want to download that message, or order it on CD from Grace to You. It's available

because it's a very definitive message establishing the foundation of the life of the church in the authoritative, revealed Scripture. So that's what we covered last week.

Going to move a little more rapidly. Let me tell you a few more things and this second one we'll build on this morning. The second thing that characterizes the church is its commitment to worship, its commitment to worship.

What do we mean by worship? We simply mean to give glory to God, to give honor to God, to give praise to God, to render obedience to God. And that starts with knowing God. We worship in spirit but we also worship in truth. In spirit means with our hearts, with all our being. We love God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength, or at least we desire to do that. And so we're talking when we talk about spirit, we mean in the inner man. It's not that we're here to do some outward duty. We're not going through some symbolic emotions, or motions. We're not doing some ceremonies or rituals, or some perfunctory mechanical things. We come with a full heart of love directed at God. And that love shows up in our praise, in our singing; it shows up in our prayers; it shows up in our hearing the Word of God with joy and receiving it with obedience. All of that constitutes our worship. We are a worshiping people.

To borrow the language of John 4 this morning, we worship in spirit and in truth because the Father seeks true worshipers. If we could define Christians in one word, it would be *worshipers*. And I mentioned this morning Philippians 3:3, we worship in the power of the spirit. We worship Christ and we have no confidence in the flesh. Other language maybe from the New Testament, 1 Corinthians 10, Paul says, "And whatever you do, even when you eat and drink, do all to the glory of God." Everything a true worshiper does is to the glory of God. We give Him honor in everything. We defer to His will in everything. We obey His Word in everything. That's a worshiper.

I was having a conversation a couple of nights ago with a gentleman who has been a Bible teacher and a faithful Bible teacher at a church in Texas, and he was telling me that after teaching the Word of God there with great blessing for many, many years, with great impact on the lives of many people, and I *know* many of these people because I've known him for a long time. The leaders of the church came to him and said to him that he's not going to be able to teach in the church any longer because he is committed to the lordship of Christ. He is committed to the lordship of Christ. That bothersome doctrine that seems to be such an intrusion into people's freedom, to confess that Jesus is Lord, is in this church, at least, an unacceptable doctrine.

How in the world can you explain then what a Christian is if you use the biblical language that a Christian is a worshiper of God? That in its very expression says that the Christian by nature, new nature, recreation, bows to God--Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

A familiar word in the New Testament for worship is *proskuneo,* which means literally to “bend your knee”; it means to bow down. Worship is just that: it is submission, it is submitting. But those who fight against the idea of the lordship of Christ as if it’s some intrusion, as if it’s some human work to bow your knee to Christ at the point of salvation have therefore eliminated the whole concept of salvation being an act of worship. We talked about the woman at the well, this morning, didn’t we? And she began to bow; she began to bend and bow to God when confronted by her sin and the promise of eternal life. And recognizing her guilt and her desperate need for living water, she began to bow. And that’s what every sinner does. This is the very nature of worship. We ascribe to God worth. The old English word is “worthship” from which we get *worship*, sort of a contracted word--worthship, meaning we ascribe to Him the ultimate worth, the ultimate value, the ultimate honor, respect, adoration, and reverence.

And, of course, we could define this as love, loving God with our heart, soul, mind and strength, and Jesus says if you love Me, you do...What?...you “keep My commandments.” How anyone could assume that someone is a Christian who doesn’t bow to God, who doesn’t affirm His sovereign lordship is beyond my understanding. Worship rises to God from the heart of every true Christian because the Father seeks true worshipers and the Father makes true worshipers. We have been saved to be worshipers.

And so, the church of necessity, by very definition, is God-centered, is God-centered. We have been saved to be worshipers. The church cannot fulfill its mission and be man-centered. It must be God-centered.

A couple of verses will put us in touch with this and there are many, but let me just remind you of a couple that are somewhat familiar to you. Turn to Romans 12 for just a moment, that familiar opening of this twelfth chapter in Romans as Paul transitions out of the doctrinal section in 1 to 11 into the practical section; he defines essentially what Christians are called to do. Therefore, based upon all the great mercies of God, all the great aspects, features, elements of salvation which have occupied the first eleven chapters, every feature of salvation is explored in those previous chapters. And chapter 11 ends with this marvelous doxology about the riches of the wisdom and the knowledge of God and the unsearchable judgments, and unfathomable ways of His, and all of it redounding to His glory at the end in verse 36, “for from Him, through Him, to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen.” That is the only possible expression of a true believer--worship.

And naturally all of that section on salvation ends in a doxology. We always say theology leads to doxology. And so based on all of that that has been granted to those who are in Christ called, by Paul, in chapter 12, verse 1 “the mercies of God”--“I urge you, brethren, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice.” That is worship, to present yourself, your body and all that is in it, to God as a holy sacrifice, a living sacrifice. Not a dead sacrifice but “a living one, acceptable to God. This is your spiritual service of worship.”

We are worshipers and our worship essentially means that we bow to God fully, that we offer up ourselves like a sacrifice on an altar, not a dead sacrifice, but a living one. And we do it in an acceptable way to God. That is our spiritual service of worship. And again, this is not to be mistaken, this is so plain and so obvious. The contrast is given in verse 2, “Do not be conformed to this world.” You’re stepping away from that. You don’t bow to this world. You don’t bend to this world. You don’t submit to this world, but rather to God as your spiritual service of worship and “be being transformed,” it literally says, “by the renewing of your mind so that you may prove in your behavior what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.”

What does it mean to worship? It means to offer yourself up totally to God as a spiritual act of worship, and that fleshes out by you not being conformed to the world but rather conformed to the will of God. That is what is good and acceptable and perfect to Him. This is how we live our lives, in full submission to God as an act of worship.

One other passage, just to touch lightly on, 1 Peter 2:5. Peter is describing what it is to be a believer here. He talks about us like babies who desire the pure milk of the Word. He doesn’t mean we’re spiritual babies, he means we desire the Word the way a baby desires milk. It’s talking about the single desire of a believer is for the soul-feeding Word of God. And then He goes on further to talk about what it means to be a believer when he says in verse 5, “You also as living stones are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.” Your life is a sacrifice and everything in your life is offered up as a sacrifice to God. You give Him everything--everything you are, everything you do, everything you possess, every experience, every trial, every positive event in your life, every discouraging event; it is all offered up to God. In a sense you’re saying, “I submit it all to you, to your sovereign purpose and will, and I obey in everything.” That’s what it means to be a Christian.

How can you question confessing Jesus as Lord if you just leave that language aside and look at the language of worship? We are worshipers. And by the way, that’s what we’re going to do forever in heaven, right? Revelation 4, Revelation 5, you can read them on your own, all about worship. And it’s a picture of heaven and all the angels and all the glorified saints are sitting around the throne of God and worshiping, worshiping, worshiping, worshiping. Worshiping in what they say and, of course, forever worshiping in what they do to serve God perfectly.

The church then is a worshiping community of people. It is not man-centered. We don’t come together to give attention to ourselves. We don’t come together to talk about ourselves. We don’t come together to tweak our lives a little bit on a temporal level or a material level or a psychological level, or a sociological level. We don’t come together to figure out solutions to the problems of the planet. We’re not a political group. We’re not a lobby group. We are worshipers of the true and living God, who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit. We worship with joy; we worship with love; that’s what we

do.

So anytime an unbeliever comes--look at 1 Corinthians chapter 14 for a moment--anytime a non-believer comes, there should be an experience that is defined by Paul in 1 Corinthians 14 down in verse 23, “The whole church assembles together.” And he’s talking about this phenomenon of speaking in languages, which existed in the apostolic times as a sign from God, and he’s talking about it. But he says this, “If the whole church assembles together and everybody speaks in these languages, and ungifted men [or unbelievers, one and the same] enter, will they not say that you are mad? But if all prophesy”--doesn’t mean predict the future; it means to speak, to speak the Word of God. An unbeliever or an ungifted man enters; he’s convicted by all; he’s called to account by all; the secrets of his heart are disclosed and so “he will fall on his face and worship God, declaring that God is certainly among you.”

Now what do you want an unbeliever to do when he comes to church? You want him to become a...What?...a worshiper. So how does he become a worshiper when you’ve got chaos going on, craziness going on? And, of course, then the gift of languages was a legitimate gift; that it was terribly abused by the Corinthians to the degree that some of them were standing up and claiming that they were speaking in a language from the Holy Spirit and cursing Christ. It was bizarre. And it is regulated here even in its apostolic form; it is regulated here. Never more than two or three; never a woman; always with an interpreter; that’s all in this same chapter.

The people come into a kind of a cacophonous, charismatic event such as you see on television. Some of you have come from and experience...there’s a madness about that. When people come, and the Word of God is being proclaimed, and the truth is being proclaimed, there’s a very different reaction. They’re called to account by the Word of God. The secrets of their hearts are disclosed by the Word of God. They will say God is in this place. Maybe they will fall on their faces and worship God.

So if you want an unbeliever to be impacted, be a worshiping community. We worship in spirit and truth. The unbeliever needs to come and be exposed to the Spirit, the singing, the praise, the joy, the love, the heart attitude, but also to be exposed to the truth, to the truth. You would think in the contemporary church that unbelievers should come and never have to encounter serious worshiping people; they’ll be offended. They’ll be alienated. You would think that a kind of madness, or a kind of a cultural adaptation would be more winsome. But the truth of Scripture is very clear. You want someone to come and fall down in worship, then show them what you are a worshiping people. And you’re worshiping in Spirit and in truth.

So when you think about the life of the church, you have to realize that the church is committed to the absolute authority of Scripture, and it’s committed to being a worshiping...a worshiping group. That’s what we do. We worship with joy and love in the truth, revealed in Scripture concerning the Trinity.

Thirdly--and this is another very important component of life in the church--the church is committed to doctrinal clarity, the church is committed to doctrinal clarity. I've got to be careful here 'cause this is one of my favorite subjects. Clarity is good, wouldn't you agree? Clarity is good. Anybody can be hard to understand. Sometimes you hear somebody say, "Well, I heard such-and-such speak but it was over my head."

Not really. No. Do you know why you couldn't understand? Because the speaker didn't understand. If it's not clear for you to understand, it is not clear for him. It's very easy to be hard to understand. If you sort of pride yourself on being so erudite that nobody understands you, the truth is you don't know what you're talking about. And one thing is for sure, if you don't get it, you can't make somebody else get it. Easy to be hard to understand. Just don't know what you're talking about and nobody else will. Very hard to be clear. Very demanding to be clear. That means you've got to go to the Word of God and you've got to apply the science of hermeneutics, the principles of interpretation to Scripture. You've got to work at it. You've got to study to be disciplined to show yourself approved to God, a workman needing not to be ashamed. It takes great effort to understand the Word of God. You need to be like the noble Bereans who searched the Scripture to see if certain things were so. But the church has the obligation to make doctrine clear.

Some years ago we were doing a lot of writing and talking about the emerging church. It emerged and then it went right back away again. Vestiges of it are still around the world, however. But the emerging church featured this idea, the Bible's not clear. The Bible lacks perspicuity, which is a word that means clarity. The Bible is not perspicuous and throughout the history of theology, theologians have always said that the Bible is clear. They believed in the perspicuity of Scripture, the clarity if Scripture, that Scripture is intended to be revelation, not obfuscation. It's intended to make things clear, not make things dark and not understandable. But the fantasy about mysticism and the dark things that the emerging church was into, including the way they conducted themselves in dark rooms with candles in the corner, was sort of a metaphor for the fact that they didn't understand the Bible. And they were very proud to say they thought the Bible was unclear-—an old book, an ancient book. We don't really know what it means so we wouldn't want to work on that, we don't want to become doctrinal, that's divisive. Nobody really knows what it means so let's just bask in its obscurity. That was the emerging church movement.

Well, it's hard to sell a movement like that because you don't know what you're selling. We're committed to the fact that God revealed Himself in His Word in such a way that we can understand it, that He used real language that means exactly what it says--real people, real history, real language. And you can interpret the Bible the exact same way you would interpret the Constitution of the United States or any other thing you read, any other document with the same reasonable approach. And we talked about that last week.

Throughout the ministry here at Grace Church, if you were to pin me down on what kind of Bible exposition that I'm committed to, I would say it's theological exposition. What I mean by that is sequential exposition that identifies theological truth and crystalizes that truth and passes it on to you. You understand that. It's not just telling the story in the narrative, it's pulling out the principle. I used to call it principlizing the Scripture, drawing out the doctrine that is there, crystalizing that doctrine, supporting that doctrine from other passages. You know as I preach that I'll be in a passage and I'll go somewhere else, and I'll get a verse here, and a verse there, and a verse here. This is what theologians, the Reformation, called *analogious Scriptura, analogious Scriptura*--the Scripture is analogous to itself. That is to say, the Bible is the best source of explaining the Bible. Other passages explain every passage. It is consistent because it has one author. So we go through a passage and we draw out principles and then I show you typically week after week, year after year, how this principle is further clarified and articulated in other places in Scripture. Now you have a doctrine. This is consistent with how the church has always functioned from its earliest days.

In fact, this is what we mean by creed. You've heard about a creed--the Apostles' Creed; or a confession--the Westminster Confession; certain Baptists confessions or other kinds of confessions that have been identified through the centuries by groups of believers. What they have done is identified in Scripture propositional truth, propositional truth--revealed, clear doctrine. And they have crystalized those doctrines and they've assembled those doctrines into creeds, and you even find some of them in the New Testament, such as the one we noted last time in Paul's letter to Timothy. Just after he talks about the church being the pillar and ground of the truth, he then gives the common confession: "He who was revealed in the flesh, vindicated in the Spirit, seen by angels, proclaimed among the nations, believed on in the world, taken up in glory." Probably a hymn, but a creedal hymn concerning Christ.

We have a doctrinal statement at Grace Church called "What We Teach," because we would like to call it "What We Believe," but not all of you are there yet. But it's what we believe and it's what we teach and it clarifies. If you don't have a copy of that, get a copy of that because this is the doctrinal statement we affirm. It is historic. It's not just our church. It's what the true church and those who have been sound in doctrine have always believed and been crystalized and clarified through history.

When all of this comes together we call it systematic theology, systematic theology. That is to say that you can put all the theology of Scripture together in a consistent system that is reasonable and non-contradictory because God is the author of all of it, and God is ultimate reason and cannot contradict Himself.

So, we have a doctrine of God. We have a doctrine of the Trinity. We have a doctrine of Christ. We have a doctrine of man. We have doctrines of salvation, all aspects of it. We have a doctrine of Scripture. We have many doctrines concerning the nature of God. We talk about God as omniscient,

omnipresent, omnipotent. We talk about God as immutable, meaning He doesn't change. There's such a doctrine as the aseity of God, the nature of God. There's the doctrine of the impassability of God; that is that God doesn't alter Himself based upon His passions, but is consistent. These are doctrines that have been affirmed, clarified in Scripture, assembled together in a systematic way. Every believer should have a systematic theology. Go to the bookstore when you come in to go to the Grace Grill this week and get yourself a theology, get a systematic theology. There's some good basic systematic theologies and you will love that. I read systematic theology all the time. I have a stack by one of the chairs at home. I have books by all the chairs. This particular chair has a stack of big fat theology books, some of them as much as two and a half or three inches thick, and I read theology. I love to read theology, the systematization of everything that the Bible teaches, and we're committed to that.

Now I don't need to beg the point any further except to say that when you get in to the pastoral epistles, if I took the time, 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, Titus, right? Pastoral epistles written from Paul to a pastor telling him about the church. Time after time after time, 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, Titus, you hear this, "Sound doctrine, sound doctrine, sound doctrine, sound doctrine." And doctrine is kind of a heady word; simply means teaching. But it speaks off a propositional truth, not about a style. It's about propositional truth--sound doctrine, sound doctrine. You get to Titus chapter 2, and we're instructed as those who have been given on the pages of holy Scripture sound doctrine to teach it. "But as for you," Titus 2, "speak the things which are fitting for sound doctrine." The chapter ends, "These things speak and exhort and reprove with all authority and let no one disregard you."

Once you know truth, once you know propositional truth, once you know doctrine, you teach it with authority and you let no one disregard you. What is the word "disregard?" It's a word that simply means evade, get around you, wiggle out. You have sound doctrine, you teach sound doctrine, and you let no one evade sound doctrine.

The church then is, and this builds on point one from last week, the pillar and ground of the truth in which there is clarity about doctrine. You say, "Well, why does that matter?" I'll tell you why it matters. Because you will live your life based on doctrinal conviction. Let me tell you what I mean by that.

Many, many Christians throw Bible verses around and they throw Bible verses around. When they get in stress, they pull out a Bible verse. Probably the most commonly used, Romans 8:28, "For all things work together for good to them that love God and are called according to His purpose." Now a Christian might say, "Well, I...I have that verse, it's all going to work together for good." But a Christian who has that verse and not a doctrine of the sovereignty of God has a weak position. How do you know that that verse is true? How do you know that the outcome is good? If you have a doctrine of the sovereignty of God and all the doctrines that go with His sovereign grace extended to His people and His purpose fulfilled for His people, then that one verse is tied to something that is firm and immovable.

You can say, “Well, John 3:16, ‘God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believes,’ so forth.” If that’s all you know, you can hope that that’s true. But if you have a doctrine of salvation and a doctrine of regeneration, in other words, every verse is imbedded or related to a doctrine, and when all you know is the verses, they kind of fly around loose. But when you know the doctrine, the verses take on their full meaning.

All right, there’s a fourth thing and this is tied into it, that when you look at the life of the church, this is what you see, or should see. A commitment to the absolute authority of Scripture, commitment to worship, doctrinal clarity and I just need to say...give a footnote to that. Every great ministry in the history of the church was founded on sound doctrine, not on experiences, not on feelings, not on emotions, not on sort of floating Bible verses but sound doctrine. And here’s...here’s why. Because the fourth element of life in the church is spiritual discernment, spiritual discernment. The only people who are really discerning are people who have sound doctrine. The uniqueness of the church is that because we know what the Bible teaches, because we have doctrine that is sound, we can discern. We know how to measure everything. We know how to test everything. This is, of course, a principle that appears in many places, both in the Old Testament and the New Testament. We don’t have time to go back into the Old Testament, but listen, for example, to Colossians 1:9: “For this reason, also, since the day we heard of it, we have not ceased to pray for you and ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding.”

Spiritual wisdom and understanding is discernment. And when you...when you’re filled with the knowledge of sound doctrine, you have discernment. You can sort out the things that are going on in the world.

Turn to 1 Thessalonians chapter 5. This one will get a direct focus on the issue at hand. And we’ll just look at verse 20, “Do not despise prophetic utterances.” And again, this is prophetic, not in the sense of predicting the future, but like a prophet, one who spoke for God. Don’t despise those who speak for God. They’re going to be out there. Don’t despise them. However, verse 21, “But examine everything and hold fast to that which is good”...and literally...“shun evil no matter what form it comes in.” What form, what scheme, what system? That’s a call for discernment. Be able to separate error from truth.

Now we’ve talked about this a lot, 1 John 2, John says, “I write unto you, young men, because you have overcome the wicked one.” How have you overcome the wicked one? Wicked one, Satan, how have you overcome him? “You’re strong in the Word and you’ve overcome the wicked one.” When you’re strong in the Word, you overcome the wicked one in this sense. He is disguised as an angel of...What?...of light. Satan operates in false religion. You will overcome all the deceptions, all the seductions of false religion when you’re strong in the Word. Why? Because you have discernment, you have discernment.

When people ask me, “What is the biggest problem in the church today?”, I will say that the biggest manifest problem is the utter lack of discernment. And it backs up to not having clear doctrine, which backs up to not submitting to the authoritative Word of God. It’s like spiritual AIDS.

I wrote a book and I was looking at it a little bit today and the subtitle of the book was, “When the Church Loses Its Will to Discern.” The title was *Reckless Faith* back in 1994, *Reckless Faith*. “When the Church Loses Its Will To Discern.” It...I compared it to...to having AIDS. People don’t die of AIDS. AIDS is just a deficient immune system, and they die of a thousand diseases. And there is just a general deficiency in the immune system of professing Christians by which they can die from a thousand heresies. The reason false forms of Christianity flourish is because people don’t have discerning mechanisms. And people will say, “Well, you know, we don’t want a lot of doctrine because doctrine divides and people who are strong in doctrine are proud and overbearing and lack tolerance and all of that.”

Well, if you don’t have sound doctrine, you don’t have discernment. If you don’t have discernment, you have spiritual AIDS, and you can be sucked up and seduced in a myriad of ways.

What happens to people without theology? Without discernment? They get caught up in emotion, mysticism, irrationality. They get led astray by false teachers. It is desperately critical for us to have our senses brought to a fine point as Hebrews 5:14 says, so that we can discern good and evil. Don’t despise preaching, but be able to see the truth and the error. Whatever is good, embrace it, cling to it, hold fast. Whatever evil, whatever scheme it might be, shun it, stay away from it.

One of the things, of course, that we try to do here is help you to discern things. This morning I gave you some statements from Mormonism. Why did I do that? To pick on the Mormons? No, just to let you know that if you look closely at that, you just hearing those things know those are lies. You know that because your senses have been heightened to discern the truth from error. And the people who are caught up in that, they’re our mission field and they need to be rescued out of that kind of error.

Even the armor of the believer in Ephesians 6 talks about the sword of the Spirit. This sword is a very precise instrument. There are several words for “sword.” This one is a very precise instrument--*machaira*, small dagger, like a scalpel. The Word of God has to be used with precision. Spiritual discernment is critical. If you have spiritual discernment, you become a priceless person, you have answers, you understand, you can pass that on to the people you love, to your children, and to many others.

One final comment, at least for tonight; we’ll do some more next week. The church is known for these four things and one more I’ll give you. The pursuit of holiness, the pursuit of holiness, the pursuit of holiness. We have been called, 2 Corinthians 7:1, to cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh,

perfecting holiness in the fear of God. In the language of 1 Thessalonians 4:7, God has called us to sanctification. The New Testament just makes so much of this. First Peter chapter 1, you might turn there, verse 11. Peter in verse 13 says, “Prepare your minds for action. Keep sober, fix your hope completely on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ as obedient children, do not be conformed to the former lusts which were yours in your ignorance but like the holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behavior .” And then borrowing from Leviticus, where it says this many times, “You shall be holy for I am holy.”

A couple of years ago I gave a message at a Shepherds’ Conference entitled “Sanctifying Shepherds.” The responsibility of a pastor and a shepherd is to be a sanctifying influence in the life of his people. Not a corrupting influence. Which means that you don’t lead them toward the world, you lead them toward the Lord, toward heaven, toward what is pure, what is holy.

In Ephesians 5, again we find familiar instruction along this line. “Therefore, be imitators of God, be Godlike, walk in love as Christ loved you and gave Himself up for us an offering and sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma. Immorality, any impurity, any greed must not even be named among you as is proper among saints.”

This kind of sin shouldn’t even be named among us. And where it appears, Jesus said in Matthew 18, “Go to that person, confront that sin, call that brother to repent. If he doesn’t repent, take two or three witnesses. If he still doesn’t repent, send the church. And if he still doesn’t repent, put him out, put him out,” Matthew 18. There should be “no filthiness, no silly talk, coarse jesting, for you know this with certainty that no immoral or impure person or covetous man who is an idolater has an inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God.” Why would you want to act like the people who aren’t in the kingdom? “You used to be darkness,” verse 8, “now you’re light.” Everything is changed.

He goes on to talk about all of this, all the way down in this wonderful chapter, even into marriage and relationships and families. The pursuit is always holiness.

Maybe just two other passages and then I’ll stop. First Thessalonians 3:11, “Now may our God and Father Himself and Jesus our Lord direct our way to you, and may the Lord cause you to increase and abound in love for one another and for all people just as we also do for you that He may establish your hearts”...Listen to this...“without blame in holiness before our God,” “without blame in holiness before our God and Father when Jesus comes.” When Jesus comes, you want to be found blameless, you want to be found in holiness. Of course.

Back in 1 Corinthians 11, “I’m jealous for you,” verse 2, “with a godly jealousy. I betrothed you to one husband so that to Christ I might present you as a pure virgin, but I’m afraid that as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your minds will be led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ.”

I want you to be a chaste bride. I want you to be holy.

Now let’s end where we started. Turn to Hebrews chapter 10. We started talking about worship and let’s end there. Hebrews chapter 10 and verse 19, this is how we worship. We worship with confidence; we enter into the holy place, the presence of God who inhabits His people’s praise. He is here. We have confidence. We “enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way [the New Covenant] which He inaugurated for us through the veil, that is, His flesh. And since we have a great priest over the house of God. let us draw near.” We’re back to worship. Let us draw near with a sincere heart, in full assurance of faith. And then this, “Having our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.” That’s coming with clean hands and a pure heart. To borrow the Old Testament psalm--pursuit of holiness, pursuit of holiness.

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