

BEING
THE CHURCH
THAT
PEOPLE
NEED

NOT THE CHURCH
THAT PEOPLE WANT

Adapted from Sermons
by

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Being The Church That People Need

Not The Church That People Want

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Forward

The following fourteen messages are about being the church that people need. That is quite different than being the church that people want.

In this day of compromise when churches turn from following God's word and turn to wanting to be loved and accepted by the world, Pastor Dan Gordon points out how important it is for any of the Lord's churches, large or small, to stay focused on the truth of God's word and the objective He has given us. It does matter HOW that objective is accomplished. God DOES care how we worship Him. We MUST maintain the things that God's word tells us.

In this series, you will learn how important it is for God's churches to maintain their focus upon God, to be distinct and separated from the world, as well as how important it is for God's people to maintain God's ways and not employ worldly tactics in the Lord's churches, if we are to be the church that people need rather than the church that people want.

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Chapter 1

Maintaining a Proper Perspective

“Why trimmest thou thy way to seek
love?” – Jeremiah 2:33

MAINTAINING A PROPER PERSPECTIVE

In Jeremiah 2, Jeremiah preaches what would be his first message to the people of Judah. He begins in chapter 2:1-3 by picturing Israel and Judah in their younger days, as a people who loved the Lord and were anxious to please Him. From that point on, he begins to mention the sins of the people. It leads up to this question, found in verse 33. He asks it again in verse 36, *"Why gaddest thou about so much to change thy way?"*

Consider this question, *"Why trimmest thou thy way to seek love?"* The word *"trimmest"* conveys the idea of taking away, such as trimming a bush. But it also conveys the idea of adding to, as in to decorate, to accessorize, to add something additional. We say, "... all the trimmings." It conveys the idea of both taking away and adding to.

As you read Jeremiah 2, it is very obvious it was a time of sin, wickedness, and rebellion against God. It was a time of defilement and shame, a very, very troubling and confusing time. God's people were on a path of certain destruction. As a people, they desired to be loved by the wicked. We see that in verse 33, *"Why trimmest thou thy way to seek love?"* God's people were seeking the love and approval of the wicked and this is why they "trimmed" their way. They added to and took away from God's ways, because they were seeking approval and acceptance. They were seeking love.

In this series of messages upon "Being The Church That People Need", we will find that it is quite different from "being the church that people want". There is a big difference.

We want to base the thought for this message on Jeremiah 2:33. God's people sought love and approval of all the other people around them. This resulted in them adding to and taking away from God's ways, both of which are sin. We are not to add anything to God's word and we are not to take anything away from God's word.

First of all, we want to consider the circumstances in which the Lord's churches find themselves in the world

today, the world that we are called to serve God in. In 2nd Timothy 3:1, the Apostle Paul writes, "*This know also that in the last days perilous times shall come.*" Notice those first two words "*this know*". Paul tells Timothy, "You need to know". You need to know the time in which you live. You need to have some comprehension, some understanding of what is happening. We need to have a sense of awareness of what is happening. We need to get a grasp of the times in which we live.

Paul says, "*This know also ...*", or in addition to, which of course takes us back to the immediate context of verses 25 and 26. In verse 25, we read of "*those that oppose themselves.*" To oppose is to be against. They are against themselves. They are not willingly living in opposition to themselves, but simply by the way they live their lives, they live against themselves, against their own well being. In verse 26, he goes on to talk of those that are taken captive. In a time when people are against themselves, they are their own worst enemy, if you will, and are in the very chains of the devil, the church needs to be what people need, not what people want. Why? Because those who oppose themselves certainly do not know what they need. Furthermore, what they think they need, is in opposition to their own good, is against their own good. They oppose themselves. Paul goes on to describe these times as perilous, difficult, trying, and hard times.

I believe the last days began with the incarnation of Jesus Christ. Therefore, we are in the last days, they are progressing, and have been since that time. We are definitely in the last days of the last days. The BIBLE plainly teaches that men will wax worse and worse. Things are not going to get better. We are living in very, very difficult times, and they are going to get more difficult. We are living in very trying, threatening, very dangerous and hazardous times.

The word perilous is the same word translated "exceeding fierce," speaking of the demon possessed man of Gadara. That means in the last days, "exceeding fierce"

times shall come and they are demonic in their origin. In other words, very hostile, very aggressive, very unrestrained times will come. That is what Paul talks about in Thessalonians. The restrainer, which is the Holy Spirit, being removed. The Holy spirit, as a restraining agent, is gradually being removed today and that is why men wax worse and worse. Not that they are more depraved than they ever were before. Total depravity is total depravity. However, they are more brazen and open in their sin, and less and less restrained by the Spirit of God. These are the days in which we live. In such times the church needs to be what people need, not what they want.

In Jude and 2nd Peter, the BIBLE talks about people being deceived. People who are deceived do not know what they need. Lost man and the backslider don't know today what they need in church. Oh, they have some ideas, but their ideas are totally wrong. Their ideas of what they need is not what is going to help them, nor what is going to fix their lives. It may make them feel better about themselves, but it's not what they need.

Consider the influence that surrounds churches today. Consider the influence that every one of us deals with on a daily basis. We are surrounded by satanic influence everywhere. No matter where you go it's there. There is a constant onslaught by Satan to confuse everyone, even God's people. You have the influence of the world, which according to Ephesians 2, is in line with the influence of Satan. The world and the influence of the world, of course, is at enmity with God. The world today hates God and is offended by the things of God. In such times, we need to be the church that people need, not what they want. In fact we should not even concern ourselves with those that are at enmity with God, hate God, are offended by God, or what they want in the house of God. That's very dangerous. To even concern yourself with what God haters want in a church is a very, very dangerous thing. We need to be the church that people need, not the church that they want.

MAINTAINING A PROPER PERSPECTIVE

There are those who are under the influence of the world. In order to give them what they want, in order to make them comfortable, you must bring into the church the influence of the world. When you do that, you cease to be the church that they need. You now have become the church that they want. They are two entirely different things.

There is also the influence of our culture. Our culture wants nothing to do with the God of the BIBLE, absolutely nothing. The United States is not a Christian nation. We began that way, but we are not a Christian nation by any means. We are not even close. We have a culture that is thoroughly humanistic, filled with evolutionary thinking, individualism, and immorality. Our culture is a cesspool of ungodliness, and wants nothing to do with absolutes. Our culture is one that does not tolerate biblical convictions. Our culture will tolerate just about anything but the truth and biblical convictions. The influence of an ungodly, vile, abominable, world and culture is everywhere around us. We're surrounded by it. In such times, we must be the church that they need, not the church that they want.

If you are going to give those that are under the influence of an ungodly culture what they want, you must bring into the church the influence of a godless culture. You have given them what they want, but you've ceased to be what they need.

When I use the word "churches", I'm referring to just religious houses and not the Lord's churches. Most "churches" today are not what people need. They are not even close to what people need. They are far more in line with what people want than with what people need.

In our day, Satan has not decreased his hatred for God, for God's people, or for God's word one iota. He is no less of an enemy. He has not toned down at all his purpose, which is a purpose of destruction. He is just as destructive as he has always been. Actually, I believe he has increased his efforts to get an advantage over the Lord's churches and over the Lord's people. He certainly has not thrown aside any of

his devices, lost any of his wilds, nor lessened his attacks. Be sure of this, the world and the enemies of God's will, will not decrease in their enmity toward God or things of God. It will only intensify as we progress, as we get further along in the last days. That ought to make the church more aware than they have ever been and be more on guard than ever before. In such times, the church needs to be what people need, not what they want.

The world has not taken down any of its barriers to the truth. What the world wants to do is bring those barriers into the church. I have talked to numerous individuals and they say, "Oh yeah, I want to be a member of Home Baptist Church." However, they are unwilling to follow the church covenant. They are in disagreement with the covenant and everything Home Baptist Church stands for. But they know this is where God wants them. They can go to almost any other church in this county and they will let them be a member and live any way they please. But why here? Because the devil wants to bring the barriers into the building, into the assembly.

The world is not becoming more tolerant of biblical beliefs. It's not becoming more accepting of the things of God. Watch the news. Listen to the hatred. We are the enemy. We are the problem. They make this very, very plain. The world is not pulling back its opposition. This is a time when they have adopted the devil's programs. Many so called churches have adopted the devil's programs and agenda. These people are becoming more and more bold, more and more determined that you and I accept them, that you and I embrace and accept them and their lifestyle. They are not going to be tolerant of us, but they want us to be tolerant of their sin.

These are times when those who have a hatred and an opposition to everything that Jesus Christ represents, are relentless and determined. They are not ashamed of their sin. In fact, they have become more and more brazen in their sin all the time, daring the church to do anything about it, daring

anyone to say anything about it. In such times, we need to be the church that people need, not the church that they want.

We live in a time when good is evil and evil is good, in their minds. Not that long ago, even lost people had some morality. No longer. Now, those who profess to be God's people, sometimes have less than the world. It is a time when those who take a stand along biblical lines, are going to be ridiculed, mocked, and hated. We need to know the times in which we live. We do not expect to be loved, accepted, and embraced by the God haters and the enemies of truth. We expect to be ridiculed! We expect to be mocked! *We need to know the times in which we live!*

When the enemies, the haters, the despisers of God are on a rampage, they are on a mission of destruction. Let me remind you again, they are bold, they are resolute, they are determined. To give such a people what they want, is sure destruction. You would have to be a fool to give these people what they want. It will destroy you and the church. It doesn't matter how long a church has been in existence, or how much truth they have been taught, either. If you give into the world's ways, and begin to embrace the world and the ungodly, you will be ruined. You will cease to become the church that they need and you will become the church that they want. There is a danger.

In Jeremiah 2:33, God's people began to "take away" and began "add to", in order to be loved, because they sought love. Any time you take away from God's word, you will replace it with something. It is never an improvement. It is always going backwards. I do not care if you double your church attendance, it is not progress. You have gone backwards.

We have to stay focused. There is a great danger of losing focus and perspective. In Jeremiah's day, the nation was guilty of losing their focus and their perspective. They began to seek love and acceptance of the wicked. They became occupied with being loved and accepted. This

preoccupation with being popular, led to them taking away from and adding to the ways of God.

Many individuals and churches, even the Lord's churches, are doing and have done the very thing that the nation of Israel was guilty of in Jeremiah's day. They wanted to be loved, accepted, and approved. If that is your perspective, "We just want to be loved. We just want the world to accept us and approve of us", remember who you are dealing with! Remember what you are dealing with! You are not dealing with your friends. You are dealing with the enemies of God, the enemies of truth.

This desire to be loved and accepted is a part of our nature. We all want to be loved. We would rather be loved than hated. We would rather be accepted than unaccepted. It is our nature, but it should never be our focus. It should never ever be our perspective, especially when we are dealing with the world. For this to become our focus and perspective, is contrary to the very word of God. It's what Jesus reiterated to that first church in John 15:18, *"If the world hate you you know that it hated me before it hated you."* There is a link, an association between Christ and his church. "If the world hates you, it's because they hate me". Now, those that hate Christ, is that's who's approval you're looking for? *"If you were of the world the world would love it's own."* You want to be loved by the world? You must become part of the world. "Oh, the church needs to be loved by the world so they will come and they'll hear." The only way that a church will be loved by the world is to become of the world. There is no other way. That is what Jesus is saying, *"... but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you ..."* We ought to be more concerned if the world feels comfortable around us. If the world feels comfortable in our church services, that ought to concern us more than if they hate us and if they're offended by what we do. The church will never be what people need when the focus is upon being loved and accepted. Because when the focus is about being

loved and accepted you begin to take away that which offends them. And pretty soon you're the church they want, not the church that they need.

We live in a time of small churches, as far as the Lord's churches are concerned. Because of that, God's people get fearful. They begin to see their numbers dwindle and they begin to panic. They begin to get into the thought process, "You know if this continues, 10 years from now there won't be anyone left. We won't be here anymore." They begin to get in that thought process. "Why are our numbers dwindling?" They begin to ask themselves that question. "Why is our attendance going down? Are we doing something wrong? Perhaps we need to be less offensive. Perhaps we need to lighten up on some things. Perhaps we need to make it a little easier." That's what they were doing in Jeremiah's day, they wanted to be loved and accepted. Do not allow fear to grip your thinking.

Churches, for the most part, go in cycles. Churches that have been around for a while go in cycles. At times the church may be very elderly and you think, "Oh, in another 5 years, they're all going to be dead!" Then in 5 years the church is filled with young people. The Lord has his ways of taking care of his church. You and I shouldn't be that concerned about it.

We shouldn't be overly concerned with our attendance. "Oh no, our attendance is dwindling! You know I believe it's because the pastor is just not preaching the right messages. He needs to preach different messages. The lost are being offended." Do you want them to feel comfortable? Do we want the ungodly to feel comfortable? I'm not in any way implying that is our focus, but there is always the danger of that becoming the focus. In Jeremiah's day, when they sought to be loved and accepted, they added to and they took away from the things of God. It's no different today.

Today as a result of "Christianity" focusing upon being loved and accepted, focused upon being popular, they have become less offensive. You can preach all day long to

the world as long as you don't say anything, and they will love you. There are masters at it. People who have mastered the art of talking without saying a thing. The world says, "Oh, they're deep! I got a lot out of that!" The church is happy because they went away happy. If they go away happy, guess what?... they'll be back. As long as they keep coming back our numbers stay up and everything looks fine. But it's not fine. There are terrible, terrible problems.

So, the church becomes less offensive. They become more accepting, more embracing, and accommodating to the ungodly. Now they dance around their sin, and they never mention sin by particular names. They may mention it in general terms, but you better not get particular because when you start getting particular, lost people might get offended. If they get offended they won't come back. If they don't come back, how are they going to be saved? You leave the saving to God. The result of being focused on being loved and accepted is disaster.

When you want to be loved and accepted as a church, there is an attempt to make the sinful feel at ease. You want them to be comfortable and happy during the message. You want them to be happy after the message. In order to do this, first of all, you must not say anything, and secondly you must entertain them. It is the result of seeking to be loved and accepted that has brought in the contemporary music programs, which has brought about a complete alteration of what worship should be. All because we want everyone to be comfortable. A church that says, "We have something for everybody." Well, we do, but it is not what they want. Most churches that say, "We have something for everyone", mean, "We have a program, we have an activity. We have something to make everyone happy."

We don't have something that will make everyone happy. There are people that are going to go away angry. There are people that are going to come one time and never ever come back again. There are people that are going to come one time and they are going to bad mouth Home

Baptist Church. But we can never ever get so focused, “Oh we just want them to love us.” In order for that to happen, you have to compromise. You have to become them. You have to become them in order for them to be comfortable.

As a result of focusing upon being loved and accepted there's an attempt to stay away from anything that would threaten the lifestyle of the ungodly. In other words, everything in the word of God threatens the lifestyle of the ungodly so what churches have gone to is, “In order to be loved and accepted, we will stay away from anything that is threatening. We don't want to be confrontational.” Read the gospels. Jesus was very confrontational. The fact is truth is confrontational. It confronts error. “And we must stay away from anything that would cause division.” You know, some division is good. Don't always look at somebody leaving as a bad thing. Sometimes it's the best thing that can happen. God uses His word to cause some people to leave. That's what some people have lost sight of. They have this idea that God uses His word to get everybody to come in. God uses the preaching of His word to get some folks to leave for the health and the benefit of the body, and for His church. We do not want to see lost sinners and the back-sliden leave and never come back, but the emphasis should never be on keeping them. The emphasis should never be to prevent them from leaving. Because if it is, you have to become them.

All across the land, God's people are trying to win the approval of the world. Instead of being the light that reveals sin, we become just dark enough that people will not feel uncomfortable in their sin. It can not be the goal nor the concern to keep the unsaved and the back-sliden happy. That's not our goal. We're not to set out to make them unhappy, but it's not our goal to keep them happy. It does not concern me when there are lost people in a church, “... are they going to be happy with the message?” That doesn't concern me and shouldn't concern anyone. Your concern ought to be that the Lord would save their soul. When that

happens, God's going to upset them. Never let it become our focus that we have got to keep them coming, we have got to do something to get them in. When you do that, you begin to secularize the things of God and that is sin, to secularize the spiritual.

Churches that begin to have a diversity of programs, so everyone can be entertained and keep everybody happy, has led to the mega church madness. This is what has led to user friendly worship. This is what's leading to creating a new religious form where the thinking is, "We have got to keep the masses happy." It has led to a remaking of biblical traditions that are more acceptable to the modern person. "We want to minister to those who are turned off by the biblical message." What a sad commentary when a church advertises, "Come see us. We especially invite those who don't like church to come be with us." What are you saying? "We have ceased to be, we don't even pretend to be a church, so if you're tired of the old biblical way come and be with us." It's all out of the desire to be loved and accepted. They will tell you, "We are ministering to them. We are ministering to their needs." You are not capable of ministering to their needs because you have become them. You can not minister to their needs because you are now what they want, not what they need.

The whole mind set, the false premise is, "If they like us they'll be more accepting of the message of the word of God." Don't you see if that becomes your focus, "... we don't want them to get mad, we don't want them to leave...", the message of God is so altered that it's no longer what they need. What's being preached is no longer what they need. The message of God has become a message of self esteem, it's become a god-is-love theology, it has become political correctness, it has become easy believe-ism. The church is no longer what people need, it's what they want. We don't want to give the world what they want. That's not our purpose. If we are going to continue to be the church that

people need, it must never become our purpose, to give people what they want.

Beware of wanting to be loved and accepted by those who are turned off by the message of the Bible. You meet someone and they say, "Oh I went to church and the man preached from the Bible... it just turned me off." Then you say, "Oh, you ought to come to our church." What you need to tell them is, "You're going to be turned off there, too." What a shame to tell somebody to come to your church when they're turned off by biblical preaching. What a sad, sad commentary.

When you desire to be loved and accepted you begin to make deals to keep people. "Oh brother, we don't want you to leave. What can we do?" That's wrong! "Oh, we'll do anything to keep you here." How sad! You don't make deals to keep people from leaving. You don't make deals to get them in. As we've said many times, they're joining us, we're not joining them. There are things that are not open for debate. If you want to ask questions for the purpose of learning, fine. These things are not open for debate. We're not making any deals, we're not cutting any deals. "Well, this is a family of 10 people! We've got to have them!" No you don't. Don't ever think you have to have someone. If you begin that line of thinking, you're going to compromise. You can't think that way. That applies to keeping a preacher, it doesn't matter, there's no exceptions.

To be the church that people need, we need to realize this truth, "It is NOT our responsibility to make God acceptable. It IS our responsibility, our duty to declare Him." That's our duty, to declare God. When you honestly declare God, people are going to get offended, upset, and angry. People are going to leave and they're not going to come back. It's not our responsibility to make God acceptable, to make the word of God acceptable or appealing. It's our duty to declare the word of God, and that's going to offend some folks. That's what Jesus said. It's not our duty to make the ways of God appealing and

attractive. It's our duty to declare them. That's our responsibility.

Our responsibility as a church is to declare the truth. It's not our responsibility to make the church more appealing, more acceptable to the world. It's our responsibility to do the business of God. When the focus shifts to we want to be loved, accepted, popular; we want the unsaved and ungodly, the wicked and the vile, and our church services to feel warm and fuzzy and comfortable; when that becomes our focus, we cease to be the church they need, and we now have become the church they want.

Some people will say, "Well, Brother Dan, don't you understand? In order to be the church they need you got to get them to come here." That's God's business. We need to keep our business straight and keep God's business straight and that will keep us straight. Many have gone astray simply because they can not separate those issues. To be the church that people need, we can not be focused upon being loved and accepted.

Sometimes lost people or the ungodly attend services and they don't seem to be happy or mad. I'm kind of glad when they get offended because it tells me that they heard something. (We leave the rest of it with God.) There's a lot of people that don't hear. There's lost people that come up to me, I've told them they're on their way to hell and they say, "Oh I really enjoyed that." They didn't hear a word of it, because there's no way they would have enjoyed it. They would have been offended. The truth of the matter is, when we get focused upon love and we get focused upon being accepted, we've really lost focus of what it's all about. We've lost our focus on who it's about. I believe it's very, very important that we always be the church that people need, not the church that they want.

I have noticed through the years, over and over and over, people who will storm out, they will be as angry as can be. But, when they have a problem, who do they call? Because they know, there's a part of them that knows, "That's

what I need, it's not what I want, but it's what I need.” We need to be about God's business, doing everything for God's glory. These things need to be our priority, that we would never get sidetracked, thinking that we need to be loved and accepted. The best way to be loved and accepted is for people to be saved and they fall in love with you. People get right with God and they just fall in love with the church, they fall in love with everything the church stands for. That's the way to be loved and accepted. Not to become like them. It happens over and over again, it's happening in the Lord's churches today.

There are a lot of things that are stayed away from because of fear of offending. Right now, in most of the Lord's churches today there's just about every sin you can imagine. *In the church!* If you go and get concerned about who you're going to offend, you're not going to preach anything, because everything you preach is going to offend somebody. Just leave it with the Lord. Don't get overly concerned when people get upset. Rejoice that they heard something that made them angry and pray that God would use it.

Don't panic if the church begins to age and there's no young people, “Oh, what are we going to do?” Don't worry about it, it's God's business. God will take care of it. You know, people today get so concerned about young people leaving. I'm not criticizing concern, but I guarantee you, more older people have left Home Baptist Church than younger people. People aren't upset about that. Adults leave all the time. It happens all the time. “Oh, what are we going to do to get the aging population into our church?” You don't hear anybody say that! “What are we going to do to get the 60 and over crowd in?”, or the 50 and over or the 40 and over. “We want youth!” That God's business. We can't get sidetracked on those issues. Because if we do, we're going astray. It's going to be a path of ruin.

Chapter 2

A God Added Church Membership

“And the Lord added daily such as
should be saved.” – Acts 2:47

A GOD ADDED CHURCH MEMBERSHIP

We've seen so far that it's absolutely imperative, if we're going to be the church that people need, that we do not become success oriented, desiring to be accepted and loved by the world. When that happens the church will adjust their methods accordingly, adding to and subtracting from the very plain ways of God. The result is the church becomes the world. In becoming the world, they become what people want. As soon as they become the world and what people want, they cease to be what people need. We are, of course, in the last days and it should mean much to us that we would be the church that people need, not what people want.

In John 15, Jesus speaking to his church said, *“If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world the would love his own.”* You see what you have to do, what a church has to do for the world to love them. You have to be of the world. *“But because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you.”*

When a church becomes what people want rather than what people need, they no longer have a God purpose or function. They lose their distinction as the Lord's church. They lose their identity as the Lord's church. Being a church that people need requires that the church stay separate and distinct from the philosophy, reasoning, the ways, and pursuits of the world. With all that being said, what this means is, who is received into membership in the Lord's churches becomes a matter of great importance, becomes a matter of great consequence. It is what makes up the membership, that is the church. So, receiving members is of great importance and great consequence.

In Acts 2:41-47, *“Then they that gladly received his word”* [that is they were saved, they] *“were baptized: and the same day were added unto them”* [the them referring to the Jerusalem church] *“about three thousand souls. And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers. And fear came upon every soul: and many wonders and signs*

A GOD ADDED CHURCH MEMBERSHIP

were done by the apostles. And all that believed were together, and had all things common; And sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need. And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, Praising God, and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.”

Notice verse 41, “*there were added unto them about 3,000 souls.*” At the time of this addition, the church consisted of 120 members. Acts 1:15 tells us that. But, in one day, about 3,000 people were saved, were baptized, and were added to the Lord's church. There are three very important words. Saved, baptized, and added to the Jerusalem church. We read in verse 47, “*... and the Lord added daily such as should be saved.*” The Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved. From verse 41 and 47 we learn that the membership of one of the Lord's churches should consist of the saved, baptized and God added. That's what this chapter is about, “A God added church membership”. This is absolutely imperative, absolutely necessary if a church is going to be what people need rather than what people want.

To be the church that people need, proper membership is crucial. What this means is, we have to maintain a proper perspective concerning membership. The focus is never to be upon being loved by the world. None of us should get overly upset if the world does not love us. No one should get upset, in a panic mode, that the world does not love Home Baptist Church. That's just the way it is. There's only one way to get them to love you and that's to become them. Either that or the Lord saves them and changes them. The focus must never be upon being loved, the focus must never be upon being accepted or popular.

Do not go into worry mode because the world does not accept us, does not find us popular, and does not even find us desirable. If we do what we're supposed to do, the

world will not find us desirable. The focus must always remain the same; that is doing God's business, God's way, for His honor, and for His glory. We are here to do the business of God. The business of God must be done in God's way. It must be done for His honor and for His glory.

The mission, focus, and concern of the church is not about being successful by the world's standards of size and numbers. May I say that you are successful if you do what God tells you to do. That's success. Being focused upon the world's definition of success must never be the case. Christ commissioned His churches to preach the gospel, not to seek members, not to seek attendance records. The church is to be commission oriented, not numbers oriented, not success oriented. Numbers must never ever become the focus, must never become the goal. If it ever becomes the focus and the goal you will have to adapt improper methods to reach your goal. That's why we do not set goals. "Well by such and such a date we want "X" amount of people in church." That is a wrong focus. That's a very, very dangerous thing.

An improper focus or an improper goal leads to a lowering of biblical standards. If you want "X" amount of people by such and such a date, you're probably going to have to lower some standards. That's not our business. That's not what we're here for. We're here to uphold God's standards. We're here to do God's business in God's way. If you want numbers, it means you're going to have to make it easier for people to become a member. This is not the time, nor has it ever been the time, to make it easier for people to be a member of one of the Lord's churches. Putting the emphasis on making a decision instead of experiencing a changed life has allowed millions of unsaved people to become members of churches. We must be content to sow and to water then depend upon God to give the increase.

In 1st Corinthians 3:6-8, Paul said, "*I have planted, Apollos watered;*" [that is I preached and Apollos came behind me and preached some more] "*but God gave the increase.*" It's not membership drives that give the increase,

it's God that gives the increase. *“So then neither is he that planteth”* [which was Paul] *“any thing, neither he that watereth;”* [which was Apollos] *“ but God that giveth the increase.”* In other words, it's not Paul that is to get the glory, it's not Apollos, it's not any other preacher, it's not any other pastor, it's God. That's what we're here for. It's God's business. It's not to elevate people, it's not to elevate men, it's not to elevate some pastor, it's to exalt God. We are to be content to sow the seed, we are to be content to water the seed, and depend on God to give the increase. That's our business. If we ever get sidetracked from that, we cease to be what people need, and we become what people want. If we're going to be the church that people need we must be diligent in the work that God has given us do. We must leave it to God to do His work.

In Acts 2, talking about membership, it says it is God's work to add, to set members in His churches. In verse 47 we read, *“... and the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.”* In 1st Corinthians 12:18, *“But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him.”* Verse 28, *“And God hath set some in the church first apostles...”* Those verses tell us that it's not our work to add to the church, to set into the church. It's God's work to add, it's God's work to set individuals in the church. Since it is God's business to add, we do not have to do anything outside of what God has commissioned us to do to appease and to pacify people so that they will join, or to appease and pacify people so they will stay. It is God that adds to His churches. We must never ever get away from that truth. Hold on to that. It is God that does the adding. We have to just hold on to that.

Consider the blessing of a God added membership. It's a special thing to be added to the Lord's church. It is a blessing when God adds to and sets individuals in His churches. He does so for His own pleasure, purpose, for the good of His church. I try very hard never to get in the mind set, *“Wow, that person would make a good church member.”*

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There's only one way they'll make a good church member and that's if God adds them. It doesn't matter how faithful they are somewhere else. The only way they can be a good church member here is if God adds them. We must always keep that in mind. That will keep individuals, that will keep preachers from proselytizing in other churches, trying to get other peoples church members. You just wait for God to do the adding and that will save a lot of trouble down the road.

In Acts 2:41, it says, “... *added unto* ...” [added unto them which was the church.] Then in verse 47, “... *the Lord added to the church...*”. To add to is to combine. What is added becomes a part of whatever it is added to. In 1st Corinthians 12:18, “... *but now hath God* ...”. “Hath God” is a deliberate and purposeful act. God has done something. “... *but now hath God set in* ...”. God has set in. 1st Corinthians 12:28, “... *God hath* ...”. Again, a deliberate and purposeful act, “... *set some* ...”. “Set some” is indicative of choice. When God adds someone to the church, He chose to do so because He didn't add all. He made a distinction. God hath set some in the church.

Then notice what it says, “... *first...*”. That indicates order. God adds, He does so by choice, and He does so in a particular order. It may not be God's will for somebody to be a member of this church right now, but six months or a year from now, it might be. God has His order. God has His time. First apostles.

God adds to His church, God sets in His church, and whatever is added to becomes a part of. Whatever is set in becomes a part of what that individual has been set into. What I'm saying is God does not add one, set one in, for them to be separate from the church. He adds them and sets them in that they be part of the church, not separate and apart from the church. When God added you to this church, you became a part of it. Always keep that in mind. When God adds, He's making a person a part of Home Baptist Church.

If somebody comes and says, “I would like to be a member, but I do not agree with what you believe here, and I

do not agree with this part of the covenant.” What they are saying is, “I want to be a member, but I want to be separate from you all in these areas.” That's not how God adds. As soon as they say that, warning lights, warning bells ought to be going off. “This person isn't being added by God.” They're not being added by God. They want to be a member of the church and yet remain separate from it. That is a common thing today. People want to be members but they want to be separate from the church, what the church believes, what the church practices, they want to be separate from the fellowship of the church. That's not being a member. They want you to keep them on the membership rolls even though they have made it clear, “I want to be separate from you all.” That's not a God added membership. In a God added membership, the individual that is added has become a part of. A choice had been made by God. God has set some in the church. That is why we read in 2nd John 1, the church is called what? The elect lady. She's an elect lady. A God added membership.

You see the church is much like a tree. If you want to add to a tree, you don't pick up a dead branch from off the ground and tie it to it. That's not adding to that tree. That branch becomes an encumbrance. In order to add there has to be a live branch. There has to be a grafting in, and that takes skill. So it is with church membership. You and I, we can go out and gather all the branches we want and tie them everywhere we want to, but that's not adding to the church. What you have then is mess. It takes the skill of God to add to His church. In Acts 2:41-47, it is plainly seen that they that were added did not encumber, did not hinder the church. They were truly an addition in a positive way. I believe that those whom God adds will truly be an addition.

When one knows they didn't just, one day decide, “You know, I kinda like the people there at Home Baptist Church. They have a nice looking building and I like the song leader, I don't care for the pastor, but I can live with that. I like this person and that person. I think I'll join Home

Baptist Church.” There's a big difference between that and knowing that God added you. Knowing that God set you in this church. What that does when you know you've been added, when you know you've been set in, it makes a difference in the way you view your church membership. When God adds you, you view your church membership entirely different than if you're just joining a club. When God adds it's an act of grace, it's a privilege, it's an opportunity, it's a blessing. When God adds us we realize it's an obligation, we realize it's a responsibility. It makes a difference. When we know we've been added, we view our church membership differently.

We also view the church of which we are part of, differently. If you just join, you can get mad at so and so and leave and go and join somewhere else, but if you've been added, it's not easy to leave. If you've been added that church now becomes home. That church is home, an object of love and appreciation. Think of everything home means. Commitment. I have a commitment to these people. Everyone that's been added by God has a commitment to the church to which they've been added.

Home speaks of sharing. When you're added to a church you want to share. You want to share your talents, you want to share what you have with that church. You want to serve. There's a relationship. Oh, it only takes being in the service for a few minutes and you realize, “You know what, the Lord added me here, but these people aren't perfect.” That doesn't mean you love them any less. You begin to build a relationship with the people in that church.

Home also speaks of responsibility. When God adds you to a church, that church becomes your home church, you have a responsibility. Home also means accountability. In a home people are responsible, in a home people are accountable to one another. It's no different with church. Yet, today people want to join a church, they have no real appreciation, they're not willing to make any type of commitment, they're not interested in serving, they're really

not interested in a relationship with the body, they don't want any responsibility. "And who are you to tell me what to do?" They want no accountability. God is not adding them. When God adds you to a church, that church becomes special. Oh, it's far from perfect, but it becomes special. It's a very special place. God adds.

God's way works! We do not have to make Home Baptist Church desirable to those on the outside. That's not our business. You preach the truth, you pray that God will show them the truth, and if that happens, then, guess what? You've become desirable. We must simply be commission oriented. Leave it to God to add, set in whom He sees fit, when He sees fit.

A God added membership acts as a body. In 1st Corinthians 12, Paul uses the analogy of a human body when speaking of the Lord's church. Think about a human body. A body is prepared, a creation by design. The church is a body. The church has been prepared. Who has prepared it? God has. The church is a creation by design. God's design. A God added membership. A body implies organizations. Our bodily parts aren't just thrown together. There is an organization, there is a framework, there is a systematic grouping of parts, and it becomes a functional entity. That's how it is with a church when the Lord adds. If you get ahead of the Lord, and I begin to add members, and you begin to add members, you no longer have a body. You have a mess. You're no longer what people need, you're what they want.

These human bodies are not an accident. They're not just thrown together in some haphazard way. A body has been put together by the Lord in a suitable order. He put together these human bodies in a suitable order. When God adds to His church, He does so in a suitable order. You may say, "Oh I wish God would add so and so. I wish this one or that one or this one." You leave God's business alone. When God does the adding the order will be suitable. He does so for a definite purpose. This is true in our human bodies, this is true of the church.

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God has set scriptural bounds that his churches are to follow concerning the receiving members. When you begin to do the adding, or when you lose sight that God does the adding, you begin to overstep scriptural bounds. “Now so and so had been disciplined from another church of like faith. But you know what, we need a piano player, and they know how to play the piano, so we'll make an exception.” You've got a mess. You've now overstepped scriptural bounds. God only adds by following the rules that He has already established. If you have to break the rules, if you have to overstep the bounds, God isn't doing the adding. When that happens, you begin to neglect church discipline, you begin to neglect the authority of other churches. Soon you'll begin to neglect scriptural baptism, and all standards are lowered.

“But oh, things are great, we're growing.” Are you? You go out and add a bunch of branches, tie a bunch of branches on a tree in your backyard. Does that mean that tree is growing? No! What it does is look ridiculous. That's what happens today with churches. You have a mess. Things get ridiculous, because people are doing the adding instead of God. If we're going to be the church that people need, the body must be strong, the body must be healthy. We have to maintain the strength of the body, the strength of the church, the health of the church.

In 1st Corinthians 12, we see that every member must be content with their place and office in the body. You might be the ear, you might be the foot, you might be the finger, you might be the toe, you might be the hand, you might be the leg. You have to be content with whatever you are, wherever God has placed you in the church, knowing that if God has added me, I have a definite place in the body. I am a definite part of the body. I believe that everyone that God adds, has a definite place. Everyone that God adds has a definite part, a crucial part of the body. There has to be contentment with wherever God has placed us.

As you read 1st Corinthians 12, there has to be unison with the other parts, contributing to the well being of the

body. Your legs work together. If your left leg wants to go this way and your right leg wants to go that way, you're not getting anywhere. They work together. The same with your arms. They all work together. If a church is going to be what they ought to be, there will be unity. I don't believe unity is a real big problem when you just leave it to God to do the adding.

Oh, there will be disagreements, because we're people. But there won't be major divisions in the church. People will put aside their opinions, they'll put aside their hurt feelings for the good of the church. We see it here all the time. Those people are added. That proves, that shows an added membership. "Well I don't necessarily agree, but the church votes and that settles it." That's an added membership. Everyone has a right to disagree. You have a right to vote against anything this church brings up. You have that right. We're not going to look down upon you if you don't want to spend \$200 on something, you'd rather spend \$150, and you vote against it. But once the vote is taken, you go along with it. That's what a God added membership does. It's no longer an issue, it's never to be brought up again. "Oh I didn't agree with that in the first place." It's settled.

You see, a God added membership doesn't have any trouble doing that. It amazes me, when God adds, the different personalities people have. He puts them all together. If you and I were putting together a company, we probably wouldn't have done it that way. When God does it, it works. He just blends them together and it works. There has to be unity. In a God added membership, there will be unity. We've seen it here. We can talk to six different people about what we should do about something and we may get six different opinions. Come business meeting time, the church votes, it's settled. It's done. That is evidence of a God added body. When someone storms out and carries on for 3 or 4 months, that's evidence that God probably didn't add them. They're being manifested.

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Also, you read 1st Corinthians 12, there is a relation of the members to the head. Every member of our body is related to our head. Colossians chapter 1 tells us that Jesus Christ is the head of the church. The head is indispensable to the body. You can cut off my left arm, I'll continue to live. You cut off my head, I'm dead. So it is with the church. Any member can leave, members can pass away, pastors can leave, pastors can pass away, but the church continues on, because no one is bigger than the church, no one. We have to stay connected with our head. There is one that we absolutely can't do without. Jesus said, "Without me, ye can do nothing." We must always keep that in mind.

No doubt, just like with our human bodies, churches suffer losses. You have a member of a church that passes away and sometimes that can be a great loss. It can be a tremendous loss. It doesn't end the church. "Oh, what are we going to do now?" Don't worry about that. That's God's business. I do not doubt, I've seen it happen many times, churches suffer great losses. We can all think of church members that have gone on to be with the Lord here. It is a loss, but the church continues on. But, if you lose sight of Christ, you're done.

It is the responsibility, the head directs the body. Signals are sent from our brain to our arms, to our legs, to our feet, to our hands, to our fingers. When communication is stopped between my brain and my left arm, my left arm ceases to function. It becomes useless. It becomes a hindrance. It gets in the way. It's the same with church members. If communication stops between any member of the body and Jesus Christ, that member becomes useless to the body. That member begins to get in the way of the body. Now the other parts of the body have to do twice the work to make up for this dead limb over here. Do not lose communication with your head, Jesus Christ. That is the sure way of being the church that people need is for all the membership to stay in communication with Jesus Christ. We will continue to be the church that people need.

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We don't want to be the church that people want because what people want today is contrary to the word of God. We want to be here when Jesus comes. We want to be the church that people need when He comes. Will our membership grow? It might. Will it get less and less? It might. But, our business is to do what God told us to do, and leave all the rest to God.

Oh, I pray that God would add. I trust that you do the same. We pray, "Lord, that you would add to the church". I've seen it too many times, people that have added themselves, and I'll be honest with you, don't take offense, but I don't want them. I really don't. It's nothing but trouble. It doesn't matter how much money they put in the offering plate. That won't make up for the trouble that they cause. It won't make up for all the ways they just get in the way.

We pray that God would add. We do not go out asking people to join. We just pray that God would add them. That God would add them. It scares me, personally, for people to become members that aren't God added. A God added membership is crucial.

Do you know that you've been added to one of God's churches? Does it not make a difference to just know, "This is where I belong. I might not like the winter, I might not like a lot of things, but this is where I belong." You know what? There's no better place than where you belong. There's no better place on all the earth. "Oh, I'd sure like to live in such and such a place, I'd like to live in a warmer climate." Is that where you belong? There's no better place than where you belong.

If God has added you to a church, that's where you belong. Isn't it wonderful to know, "I belong somewhere, I belong somewhere." I'm glad to know that the Lord adds to His churches. That we would always keep that in mind, that the Lord does the adding. There's nothing wrong with praying, "Lord add". We ought to all be praying that. But, just keep in mind the Lord does the adding.

Chapter 3

A God Placed Pastorate

“Who also hath made us able ministers
...” – 2nd Corinthians 3:6

We have seen so far that it's imperative that we maintain a proper perspective so that we do not become focused on being loved, being accepted by the world. That kind of focus causes the church to attempt to appease the world by adding and subtracting from the plain word of God. The result is the church becomes the world, becomes what people want, and ceases to be what people need. The focus must always remain the same, doing God's business, God's way, for His honor, and for His glory. Our focus is foundational. If you focus on being loved and accepted and desired, everything about the church changes.

We've also seen that we must not lose sight of a God added membership. When we want to be loved or accepted or even desired by the world, the goal concerning church membership, the way we view church membership, changes. That's all due to a wrong focus. When the focus isn't right, improper methods are practiced, and there's a lowering of biblical standards. All of this brings about the church becoming the world, becoming what people want, ceasing to be what people need.

Another thing that is absolutely necessary to being the church that people need concerns the pastorate, the pulpit ministry of the church. The pastorate is an integral part of being the church that people need. When we lose focus of doing God's business God's way, for His honor and His glory, we shift from that focus to being loved, accepted, and desired by the world, everything becomes skewed. The mission of the church, our approach to church membership, and the office of pastor becomes skewed. Because people lose sight of what it's all about, you have a mess. You have something that can not provide what people need, can not truly help people. A God placed pastorate is absolutely imperative if the church is going to be what people need.

In Acts 20:28, Paul is speaking to the elders of the Ephesian church, and he says, *“Take heed therefore unto yourselves”* [the Ephesian elders] *“and to all the flock over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers to feed*

the church of God which he hath purchased with his own blood.” In Ephesians 4:11-16 it says, “*And he*” [that is, the Lord] “*gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For*” [the reason He gave these things, and our concern here is pastor's] “*the perfecting*” [or for the maturing] “*of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ: That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ: From whom,*” [that is, Christ] “*the whole body fitly joined together and compacted*” [pressed firmly together] “*by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love.*”

I want to consider the importance and seriousness of the pastorate to the church, which is seen from two facts. The pastor is God called and he is God placed. From both the Old Testament and the New Testament, it's clearly seen that God calls men to preach the word of God. Preaching and pastoring is not a profession, it is a calling. Paul stated that he was made a minister. He was not made a minister by a school, he was not made a minister by a church. He was made a minister by God. God made him a minister.

In 2nd Corinthians 3:6 says, “*Who hath made us*” [the who, referring back to the God of verse 5] “*able ministers.*” In Ephesians 3:7, “*whereof*” [that is, the gospel] “*I was made a minister according to the gift of the grace of God, given unto me by the effectual working of His power.*” I was made a minister according to the gift of the grace of God. This came about by the effectual working of His power. It's not just something where someone wakes up one day and

says, “This is going to be my career.” Colossians 1:23 says, *“If ye continue in the faith grounded and settled and be not moved away from the hope of the gospel which ye have heard and was preached to every creature which is under heaven whereof I Paul am made a minister.”* Paul states three times that he was made a minister.

In 1st Timothy 1:1, we see this was by the commandment of God. *“Paul an apostle of Jesus Christ by the commandment of God our saviour ... ”* Then in 1st Timothy 1:12, he says, *“... and I thank Christ Jesus our Lord who hath enabled me for that he counted me faithful putting me into the ministry.”* Paul says, “I was made a minister, I was made an apostle by the commandment of God, and God put me, set me, placed me in the ministry.”

The writer of Hebrews said in Hebrews 5:4, about the office of the Old Testament priest, which it certainly applies to the preacher as well, *“... no man taketh this honor unto himself but he that is called.”* This calling leads to a necessity. By that we simply mean, this calling becomes inescapable. It's something that you can not get away from. In 1st Corinthians 9:16 Paul says, *“For though I preach the gospel I have nothing to glory of for necessity is laid upon me.”* It is necessary. Why? Because of a calling *“... necessity is laid upon me yea woe is unto me if I preach not the gospel”*. He's saying this is something that has become inescapable, he could not get away from it, and it became his life.

You have this man, he has been called by God. He now is willing to let go of all future plans, to leave any job, to leave any career, any opportunity, family, houses, lands, to do what God has called him to do. There's a huge difference between a calling and a profession, meaning one choosing a career. This man now is willing to leave whatever he has to leave to do what God would have him to do, and to go wherever God would have him to go. God calls men to preach.

Of these men, and not necessarily all of them, God sets some in the office of pastor in his churches. I know some would disagree, but I do not believe that every one who is called to preach, is necessarily called to pastor. But, I do believe that no one is called to pastor unless they are called to preach. The who, the when, and the where God places pastors in His churches is all as He sees fit.

In Acts 20, as Paul is speaking to the pastors of the church of Ephesus, he said, “... *to all the flock over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers.*” He's speaking of a specific flock, and he says the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers over that particular flock, at that particular time. That is a God placed pastorate. We believe in a God placed membership. We believe in a God placed pastorate. Ephesians 4:11 says, “... *he gave some pastors...*”. He gave them. He gave them to His churches.

In Revelation chapter 2 and 3 it's very clear, as you read the letters to those seven churches, that God knows His churches. He know ever weakness, every strength, and every problem that they have. He not only knows the weakness, strength, and problems they now have, he knows what weakness, strength, and problems they will have in the future. He knows all their trials. This is true now, this is true in the future. He knows who their enemies are. He know the character of every one of those enemies. Churches have common enemies and churches have particular enemies. Home Baptist Church and all the churches like it, we have common enemies. But I assure you, that Home Baptist Church has some particular enemies that are enemies specifically of this church and perhaps of no other church. God knows all about that. He knows all the battles of all His churches. As you view the Lords churches collectively, we have many of the same battles. But, I also believe that there are battles that are particular to certain churches. He knows how His churches are going to be attacked in the future. He knows the needs of His churches. That's true now, that's true in the future. The Lord loves His churches. And the Lord

looks after the well being of His churches. He protects His churches.

With all of that in mind, He gives them the pastors that they need at that particular time. If the church calls the pastor that God would have them to have, he is the best pastor that that church can possibly have at that time, if they follow God's will. Not all do, of course. Really, God knows the pastor that a church needs, who Home Baptist Church needs more than Home Baptist Church knows who it needs. God knows more about what any church needs than what that church may think they need.

My point is, the pastor that a church needs ought to also be the one that they want. It ought to be the only one that they want. The only concern is, "Who does God want us to have." I realize there are doctrinal concerns, but all that works together. God's not going to give you someone who doesn't believe the truth. A God called, God placed pastor is crucial to the church being what people need.

When a church becomes focused upon, "We want to be more loved by the world. We want to be more accepted by the world. We want the world to want to come here. We want wicked sinners to just long to come to Home Baptist Church. This is what we want." If that becomes a focus, that immediately has an adverse affect upon everything a church does including how they go about calling a pastor. We get calls frequently asking, "Is there someone that you can recommend? Do you know of someone who isn't pastoring now that might be interested in coming to our church?" When they ask, "Do you know of somebody that's not pastoring?", my response is always the same. "Why can't they be pastoring? You've set a limitation." "Well we don't want to steal ...", and people have used this terminology, "... we don't want to steal someone's pastor." If God's placing them, you're not stealing them. That's the mind set churches get in. "Well, we got to call somebody that's not pastoring. We want to call somebody that young." What if God wants you to have somebody that's old? "Well, they're not going to

be around much longer. They're only going to be around another 2 or 3 years.” Maybe that's all God wants you to have them for. God does the who, the when, and where. “Well, we need somebody that has a family”, or, “somebody that doesn't have a family, because we can't support a pastor that has a family.” That has nothing to do with anything. It is, "Who does God want?" That is my response every single time. “Who does God want you to have. That should be your only concern.” It's not who I can recommend or who anybody else can recommend. Who does God want us to have.

It is not the responsibility of Home Baptist Church or any other church to place a pastor in another church. It is not the responsibility and it is not the business of any preacher to place a pastor in a church. That's God's business, just as it's God's business to place members in a church. When people begin to lose focus, it has an adverse affect upon how they consider calling a pastor. How the pastor, how the very office is viewed is really determined by our focus. The importance, the seriousness of this is that he has to be God called and he has to be the one that God has given us. God may only want to have him for two months. God may want you to have him for 40 years. That's God's business.

The importance and seriousness is also seen in the qualifications of the office. The qualifications are given in 1st Timothy 3:1-7, and also in Titus 1:5-9. You read through those qualifications. Nowhere are there more strict qualifications than for the ministry. We don't have these kinds of qualifications for the presidency of the United States. (If that were so we wouldn't have the mess we're in.) It's not the church's business to add to the qualifications. The qualifications are plenty strict. You certainly do not need to take from them. I believe the qualifications are given; 1) To protect the church; 2) To protect the ministry.

Let's say a church loses it's focus of doing God's business, God way, for His honor, and for His glory. Now this church says, “We want the world to love us. We want

sinner to just be breaking down the doors. We want them to just want to be here, want to be with us.” Qualifications then begin to be minimized. Qualifications are no longer important. “This man! He's got personality. I'm telling you, this is the guy. He can appease the people.” And qualifications? “Well he's not qualified.” “Oh, that doesn't matter. Because don't you see, he can bring people in.” Qualifications begin to be minimized, and a church is well on the road to being ruined, to being destroyed.

The importance is also seen in the purpose of the office. The pastor is an integral part of being the church that people need. When the focus is lost, when the focus becomes being loved and accepted, in the church's mind, the pastor becomes an integral part of accomplishing that goal. If he's an integral part of accomplishing that goal, we're going to have to rearrange the whole purpose of the pastorate. Now, you see, the purpose has become to bring people in. The purpose has become to be loved, to be accepted, to be desired. “You pastor, are an integral part of that.” The pastor is an integral part no matter what the focus is. He is viewed as an integral part.

In Ephesians 4, we see the purpose of the office of pastor. I believe a lot of pastors and a lot of churches make a mistake by the pastor viewing himself as a CEO of the church. That's not what he is. Read the purpose. Read why he's there. Ephesians 4:12, three things are stated and they are all spiritual. “*For the perfecting of the saints*”. That's one of the purposes. Another purpose is, “... *for the work of the ministry*”. That covers a lot of things we don't have time to go into here. The third purpose is, “*for the edifying the body of Christ.*” A threefold purpose and it is all spiritual in nature.

As you read on in these verses, you will see that this purpose is centered around Christ. The pastor is to present Christ. It is centered around truth. How does he accomplish these three things? Christ and truth. That is his purpose. Again we don't have time here to go into that. You can read

Ephesians 4:12-16, and you see that the purposes are spiritual. The purpose, obviously, is to combat error, that we'd be "... henceforth no more children tossed to and for carried about with every wind of doctrine...". Obviously a pastor is to teach truth. He is to teach truth, he is to get people established, teach them so that they can be established in the truth and doctrine. Everything centers around Christ and truth.

We also see the importance and seriousness of the office as seen in the duties of the office. We see the purpose, but how does this purpose come into fruition? He does this by performing his duties. What are his duties? Many churches have ideas about what a pastor's duties are. But, you read the scriptures and a pastor's duties are spiritual in nature. The main purpose of the office is spiritual. Therefore, the duties are spiritual. The duties correspond to the purpose. The duties help fulfill the purpose.

The duties are clearly seen by the various titles given to this man in the word of God. He is referred to as a pastor, bishop, elder, steward, and minister. All of those titles illustrate the nature, the purpose of the office, and duties of the office. The one title that sums up the duties more than all the rest is "pastor", which is a shepherd. There are basically three main duties that can be summarized under three headings, and they are spiritual in nature. He is to lead, feed and protect. It all centers upon Christ, upon the word of God, the truth.

For a church to be what people need, the pastor must be allowed to and the pastor must carry out the duties of the office. I said be allowed, because in some churches the pastor is not allowed to carry out his duties. He must be allowed to carry out his duties, which are spiritual in nature, and he must be faithful in carrying them out. He does so for the honor and glory of God. He does it, whether people will believe it or not, for the well being of that church. For the church to be what people need, the duties are spiritual in nature.

He is to lead in the path of righteousness. There's many ways in which he does that. He is to lead in the ways of God. He must never ever give the wolves an opportunity to harm the flock. He must not even give or entertain the thought of giving them opportunity. If the wolves get in, they're destruction can be so vast that a church ceases to be what people need.

He has a responsibility to protect the church from the wolves. He must be determined, "I am not going to give this church over to the devil and his crowd." He must be determined. "We're just not going to hand it over to the devil. We're not just going to hand it over to the flesh pleasers. We're not going to hand it over to the spiritually dysfunctional." He must have this determination, the whole church must have this determination. He protects the church.

He protects the church by guarding the pulpit. He does not invite anyone, to his knowledge, to preach that is going to harm or undermine in any way the truth. He has to fight many battles and most of those battles are fought behind the scenes. Most of those battles are fought so that they never have to come into the church. A church usually, quickly realizes when they're without a pastor how many battles that pastor was fighting and how many battles he kept from coming into the church by fighting them outside. It's one of his duties.

He must present the word of God. This pastor, God called, God placed man must preach the word of God. 1st Timothy 4:6-7 says, "... *put the brethren in remembrance of these thing.*" Remind them. So many times people say, "Why do you repeat some things over and over and over?" To remind, because the devil works hard to get it out of your mind. "*Put them in remembrance of these things and thou shall be a good minister of Jesus Christ.*" This God called, God placed man is there to remind people. Not everyone wants to be reminded, but he is to remind them.

"... *nourished up in the words of faith and of good doctrine.*" Good doctrine! There has to be a foundation.

“Well, we want practical preaching, we want everyday preaching.” You have to have a foundation for the practical and the foundation is doctrine. The foundation is truth. Once truth is established, now you have something to put into practice. The writer in 1st Timothy mentions doctrine. He says to the minister Timothy, “*Refuse...*”, Timothy you concern yourself with putting the brethren in remembrance. You concern yourself with doctrine and, “... *refuse profane and old wives fables*”, which is a euphemism for stupid nonsense. You refuse it all. You don't even entertain the thought of nonsense.

He goes on and he says, in verse 10, “*We labor...*”. Verse 11 “... *these things command ...*”, that's authority, “... *and teach ...*”, there has to be some knowledge, “... *that no man despise thy youth but be thou and example.*” So he is to command, teach, and he's to be and example. This is why qualifications are so important. He tells us there in verse 12, that he's to be and example. Verse 13, he says, “Timothy, I want you to give attention ...”, to three things, “... *reading, exhortation, to doctrine.*” In other words, Timothy, you are to be grounded in the word. He's to give himself wholly to them, verse 15. He's to continue in them in verse 16, “*In doing this, thou shalt save both thyself and them that hear thee.*” He saves his own life and he saves the life of those in the church.

2nd Timothy 2:5 says, “*study*”, which means to investigate, to examine, to learn, “*to shew thyself approved unto God a workman*”, a laborer in the word, a laborer in spiritual things, “*rightly dividing the word of truth.*” 2nd Timothy 4 says, “*Preach the word.*” The pastor that churches need has been God placed and it his duty to preach the word, it's his duty, every Sunday, every Wednesday, every single time the church assembles, he is to preach the word. He's to do this in season and out of season. He's to do it when people want the word, he's to do it when they don't want it. He's to do it when it's popular, he's to do it when it's unpopular. He is simply to preach the word.

Then he gives some aspects of doing that. Reprove, rebuke, exhort. “Oh, if we're going to be loved by the world, we need a pastor that is going to encourage.” Don't you see, if you take reproof, and rebuke, and exhortation you will be encouraged. The reason a lot of folks aren't encouraged is because they don't take what God has for them. 2nd Timothy goes on to say, “*a time will come*”. I believe this time comes, not just in society in general, certainly we're there, but I believe it comes in churches at times. “*The time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine.*” The time will come.

When that time comes, he says, “... *watch thou in all things, endure.*” You keep on enduring. You keep on preaching the word of God. You see the word of God is what the Holy Spirit uses to humble His people. It's what the Holy Spirit uses to guide, direct, and enlighten His people in the will and in the ways of God. It's what God uses to correct error, to warn, and to comfort His people. It's what God uses to give his people assurance and to exhort his people. It's what God uses to show his people where we are and where we ought to be going. The word of God is what he uses. Therefore, the pastor is to preach the word of God.

You know what happens when a church begin to lose it's focus? They now want to be loved and accepted. “There's visitors in the service. Oh, we sure hope he doesn't preach something today that's going to drive them away.” You've lost focus. As soon that thought comes across the mind, you've lost focus, you lost focus on what it's all about. You ought to be praying “Lord give him what everybody here needs.” “Oh, did you hear what he said? I wonder how they took that?” You ought to pray that God would just drive it home to them. People begin to get nervous about, “Well, what's he going to preach?” In another church I pastored, I've even had a couple people ask me, “Brother what are you going to preach next Sunday because I plan on inviting someone.” I want to say, “Well, it depends on who you're inviting.” That shows they have a fear. They don't want

their friend, they don't want their visitor to be offended. That shows that the focus is all wrong.

The pastor is to get up and he's to preach and he's to preach plainly, exactly, that is according to the word of God, with seriousness. "Oh we we want a pastor that's going to entertain, that's going to make people laugh, people like that." There's nothing more serious than preaching the word of God. It is to be preached with sincerity, order, consistency, fervor, enthusiasm, and conviction, making no apologies for the word of God. It is to be preached with boldness. It is to be preached in a responsible manor and, yes, it is to be preached with compassion. It is to be preached with a burden for souls. When focus is shifted to being loved, accepted and desired, the church begins to hope, "Well we hope he doesn't come on too strong on that subject. We we hope he just kinda stays away from from this area."

You know what people need to realize today concerning the word of God, the preaching of God's word? One of the purposes is to protect. God will use the preached word to drive people away also. A lot of churches think, "Oh that's awful ... you should have said it differently, you shouldn't have said it as loud, or you should have presented it a little different ... they've left!" Did you ever stop to think the preaching of God's word drove them away? God was protecting His church and He drove them away. God uses His word in a lot of different ways. That's one of them. We should not get overly concerned about those things.

The pastor must be a man of firmness, courage, and steadfastness, diligence, resolve, consistency, strength. He is to be a man of maturity, wisdom, knowledge, discretion, compassion, love, care, and prayer. A lot of people have different definitions of love and care. To many love is, "You approve of everything I do." No, love is to tell you the truth. Love is to tell you what you need, that's love and that's care.

The pastor must not be deterred. He must not be deterred by the problems, trials, difficulties, and frustrations that come along the way. He can not be deterred by the

mood swings, criticism, accusations, suggestions and opinions of the people. “Well pastor, I think you ought to preach this and here's how I think you ought to preach it.” He can't be deterred by the suggestions or the opinions of others. He can not be deterred by treatment from others, whether it be favorable treatment or unfavorable treatment. It goes either way. He can not be deterred by, “Well this person treats me nice, I sure don't want to step on their toes.” Oh, you've lost it. He can not be deterred by treatment, murmuring, and constant scrutinizing. He can not be deterred by any of these things. The ministry must be his life. That's the pastor that God will add to His churches.

At all times, the pastor has to stay close to the Lord. He has to keep his heart in a proper condition. The whole congregation can come in in a bad mood. He'd better be right with God, he'd better keep his heart in a right condition. He'd better not be subject to mood swings. You know how long it would take for a pastor to be thrown out if he was subject to mood swings every Sunday? You wouldn't put up with it, but he puts up with it all the time. For a church to be what people need, there has to be a God placed pastorate.

If I drop dead or you vote me out your responsibility becomes, “Who does God want us to have.” That becomes your responsibility. The church has a responsibility toward the office of a God added pastorate. The pastor is the special object of Satan's hatred, Satan's malice, and attacks. The devil seeks to discourage the pastor more than anyone else. He may do that by discouraging you, but he's after that pastor. He is out to deter the pastor from the purpose and from his duties in any way that he can.

We all have problems. We all have a lot of different things. There are hurts, wounds, frustrations, sorrows, loneliness, disappointments, trials, burdens, and heart aches. Though we all have those things, these are peculiar to the ministry. These things are always there. And the pastor, whoever he is, no matter how strong he is, no matter how close to God he is, he's flesh, he's human. Never elevate him

above what he is. He's human. This may come as a shock. That means he has feelings. He has weaknesses. You say, "Oh that's no shock." He has strengths, he has his own inward battles, just like you do. He has his own inward struggles, just like you.

He's got this office. He's got the care of the whole church. It's not just the care of the members of the church, the members' extended families come into it as well. The members' neighbors come into it, and on and on we could go. The pastor stands in special need of help. He stands in special need of prayer. Paul requested prayer on many different occasions of the churches. If a church is going to be what people need, they have to have a God placed pastorate. It has to be there.

The pastor has to protect the church and the church protects the pastor as well. The church does everything they can to help him. They do everything, they pray and pray and pray just like Arron and Hur upheld the hands of Moses.

The pastorate can not be neglected by the pastor, it can not be neglected by the church. He needs to be prayed for. There's nothing wrong with telling, pouring your heart out to a pastor, pouring your burdens upon him. When you do that, keep in mind that you may not be the only one that's done that that day. Have enough concern that once you have done that, "You know what? I have put all that on him, I'd better, I ought to pray for him, I ought to pray for him." I don't want to discourage anybody from coming, but when you come, pray.

We need to realize the importance of a God placed pastorate. That's true on my part, that's true on your part as well. We can't be the church that people need without this being in place.

Chapter 4

Maintaining a Distinction

“... that thou mayest know how thou
oughtest to behave thyself in the house
of God, ...”

– 1st Timothy 3:15

In this 4th message, I want to discuss that if we're going to be the church that people need, we're going to have to maintain a distinction about us. We live in a day of seeker friendly, seeker sensitive churches, when the emphasis is upon giving people what they want, what is pleasing to their flesh, what is in line with what they perceive that they need, (which is not always what they need,) and in line with their notions of God. In such a day, there is an ever present and ever increasing danger of the churches of the Lord falling prey to such thinking. This thinking, to some degree, has already made its way into most of the Lord's churches.

What we need to realize is that the entire seeker friendly, seeker sensitive church movement is built upon at least 3 false foundations; making a church more attractive to unbelievers. a wrong motive, and a wrong focus. By building on the false foundation of making a church more attractive to unbelievers we become more popular with the world, we become more desired by the world, and they do all of that to get people to come to Christ. That's a false premise, because popularity is not what gets people to the place where they will believe, where they will come to Jesus Christ. By building upon the foundations of a wrong motive, they seek to attract a crowd, to lure a crowd, which is also building upon a wrong focus. The focus is upon the seeker, and not God. When we come to worship, the focus ought always to be on God, nothing else. In the seeker sensitive movement, the focus and everything else centers around the so-called seeker.

This movement has resulted in the establishment of churches (or, religious houses) as places of entertainment and of social gatherings rather than houses of worship. The whole movement is really entertainment and social activity has replaced real worship. These churches are built upon demographic studies and marketing research. "What do the people want in our area?" Really, if you think about it, they're founded on world corporation marketing strategies and pop physiology concepts that are known to be successful

in drawing, in attracting large numbers of people. If you look closely at the seeker friendly, seeker sensitive movement, there are many parallels to major corporations in their attempt to appeal to potential consumers.

The seeker friendly, seeker sensitive church movement seeks to attract, seeks to lure the unchurched. It seeks to attract and allure people who have been turned off by the truth, who have been turned off by traditional worship services. That's the goal of the seeker sensitive movement. "That is who we want to reach, and we're going to gear all of our services to that goal." The way you reach those who have been turned off by traditional worship services is you incorporate proven consumer oriented concepts and methods of the world. You incorporate those things in order to make the church more attractive and appealing to the ungodly. Why would you want to appeal to the ungodly? Why would you want to appeal to those who are turned off by truth? That's the whole concept of this movement.

An environment is created where the so called seeker has their emotional and their "felt" needs met. "However needy you are, we'll meet your needs." They create an environment where this so called seeker can come into the worship and they'll always be comfortable. There will be nothing said and nothing done that would threaten to "rock" their present belief system. That's the mindset that is behind the seeker sensitive movement. They say, "We don't want to do anything that would rock their present belief system, we want them to feel comfortable, we want their emotional and whatever felt needs that they have, to be met." Many times all this is done through the use of modernization. There's nothing wrong with certain areas of modernization, but you better be careful, because a lot of modernization desensitizes from the old paths, desensitizes from the old ways.

The threat to the Lord's churches today is not the seeker friendly, seeker sensitive movement. The threat is the faulty premise, the wrong motive, the wrong focus that it's built upon. The threat is that this false premise, this wrong

motive, this wrong focus, would make inroads into the Lord's churches. That's the danger. It's the mindset that is behind the movement that threatens the well being of the Lord's churches. The danger to the Lord's churches is that we would adopt and fall prey to this mindset. Most already have to some degree. We could give a lot of examples, but that's not our point here. Believe me, in a lot of the Lord's churches, to some degree, the mindset of the seeker sensitive movement has already begun to make inroads. When that happens, doing God's business, God's way, and for God's glory, ceases to be and is replaced by, "We want to be loved, we want to be accepted, we want to be desired by the world." That leads to compromising and an unbiblical, God displeasing mindset of the seeker sensitive movement. The danger is that the mindset of such a movement would take root in our own minds and in our own church.

In 1st Timothy 3:15 it says, "*But, if I tarry long that thou mayest know how thou ought to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of truth.*" The first point is that the churches of the Lord are distinct. This verse makes that very clear. What do we mean when we say, "The church is distinct?" We mean the Lord's church is to be separate, fenced off, independent, different, unconnected, and detached from the ways of the world. In John 15:19 Jesus is talking to His apostles and His church, "*If you were of the world the world would love his own. But because you are not of the world, ...*" They are distinct from the world, separate from the world, they are not connected, not attached to the world, "*but because you are not of the world but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you.*" The whole mindset behind the seeker sensitive movement is, "We don't want the world to hate us." Yet, Jesus said the reason the world hates you is because you're not like them. There's only way for a church to get the world to fall in love with them and that is they become the world. At the moment that happens, a church ceases to be what people need. More than

likely, they will never again be the church that people need. There aren't too many churches that go into heresy and ever come out of it. Once a church goes down this road, it's almost a point of no return. This is very, very dangerous.

This distinction not only includes the secular world, but it includes the religious world. Reading through the gospels, it is very, very apparent that Jesus was at odds with the religious establishment. Read Matthew 23. He was at odds with that which was the mainstream of His day. The Lord's church is to be distinct not only from the secular world but from the religious establishment as well. Matthew 23 is a wonderful example, where we see Jesus constantly exposing the sham, deceit, hypocrisy, pride, error, and failure of the religion of His day. You look at modern religion today and it's no different. Pharisee-ism is alive and well today, in different forms, but the same religion. All through the New Testament it is plainly taught, it is plainly illustrated, that there is to be a clear, well defined, unmistakable, recognizable, difference between the Lord's churches and the secular world, and between the Lord's churches and the so-called religious world. In order for a church to be what people need they must maintain a distinction, the distinction that God has set down. We must be different from the world. It has to be, there has to be a difference between clean and unclean, between truth and error, between right and wrong. Read Leviticus 10:10, and Leviticus 11:47. The Jews were to separate clean from unclean, holy from that which was unholy. There was to always be a distinction, and that must always be so.

I'll tell you this for sure, wherever the Lord sows wheat, Satan sows tares. Wherever the Lord gathers sheep, Satan always herds some goats. Wherever you find grain in the field, you will also find chaff. That's true here today, that's true in all the churches. If the Lord sows wheat, Satan sows tares. We don't always know for sure the wheat and the tares, we have suspicions, but we don't always know. That's why Jesus said, let them both grow together, I'll take care of

it. That's true. If we know for sure, then of course we have a responsibility. It's not our responsibility to determine who it is that's lost and get them out. Jesus said, I'll take care of it, and He will. That doesn't go against church discipline. This is where the danger is. Because there are tares, because there are some goats, because there are some chaff, it's easy, many times, for God ordained distinctions to become blurred. We have to make sure we maintain distinction. We can not blur that distinction.

In 1st Timothy 3:15 the description of the church manifests a clear cut distinction. Notice it is referred to, first of all as the house of God. There is a distinction between the house of God and all other houses. That immediately implies a distinction that it's God's. The distinction is also that it is a spiritual house not a materialistic house. We see in 1st Peter 2:5, speaking of the saved, we are lively, spiritual stones. As such, we are referred to in Galatians 6:10 as *“the household of faith.”* Ephesians 2:19, it is referred to as *“the household of God.”* Don't you see, there's a distinction. The household of God, the household of faith. It's His house. That means He builds it, He provides for it, He protects it, and He dwells in it. That makes it distinct from all others. Why would we want to blur the distinction? We are God's house. Don't ever allow that distinction to become blurred, to blend in with the world. It is God's house. It is made up of a part of God's family. That's special.

This house consists of a master of the household that, of course, is Jesus Christ. In this household, just like in most households, there are spiritual adults, there are spiritual children, and there are spiritual babes. There are stewards to give what each of these needs. The house of God is never to be turned into the world. It's never to become anything but the house of God. When the house of God becomes the world, can it really be called, “The house of God”, any more? They begin to lose their distinction, and they begin to cease to be the church that people need, and are becoming the church that people want. Yes, if we so choose, we can give

the world what they want, but we'll lose the distinction of being the house of God. So, we must continue to be what they need.

It is also referred to here as the church. It is *“the house of God, which is the church”*, a called out assembly, *“of the living God.”* If it is a called out assembly of God, He's the one that called it out. He's the one that assembles it. That makes it distinct. An assembly must assemble. You can't have an assembly unless you assemble. A church being an assembly, must assemble. A congregation must congregate.

It is referred to here as *“the church of the living God.”* Now the church of the living God is never to become the world. A distinction must be maintained. We are the house of God, we must maintain that distinction. We are the church of God, we must maintain that distinction. We have to maintain that in order to continue to be the church that people need.

Notice these two descriptions in 1st Timothy 3:15, *“the house of God”* and *“the church of the living God”*. Those two phrases declare that the house is God's and the church is God's. It's His. It belongs to Him. He is the owner. We have to realize that if we're going to maintain this distinction. In Matthew 16:18, Jesus declared, *“I will build my church”*, and that little word *“my”* makes it different from all others. People today say, “Well, one church is just as good as another.” How can that be? If Jesus built the church and He called it “My church”, don't tell me that that church isn't better than all the rest. It's His. It immediately implies that there is a distinction.

Home Baptist Church, it's not my church, it's not your church. “Oh I've been going here 20 years, it's my church.” No it's not. I don't care if you've been going here 50 years or 100 years, it's not my church, it's not your church, it's not our church. It's His. When we get to thinking it's ours, then we begin to think we have some liberties. If we keep focused that it's not mine, it's not yours, it's not ours, it's His, we're

not at liberty to do just what we please, because it's not ours. It belongs to Him. It is distinguished from all other churches. If the church is to be what people need, that distinction has to be maintained.

Notice what else it says in 1st Timothy 3:15, “*the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth.*” The purpose of the church is to uphold, to maintain, and to set forth the truth, not what we think is the truth, but the truth. It is also the ground of truth. It is the source of truth. God has deposited His truth in His churches. When we begin to think we're the pillar and ground of truth, and we want to lure those in who have been turned off by the truth, how are you going to do that? You're going to begin to fiddle with the truth. When you do that, where does it stop? Soon it's no longer the pillar of truth. When that happens, you're no longer the church that people need. Oh you might make them feel good, but that's not what they need. They need the truth.

We have the truth. The truth is a mark of distinction. It distinguishes the Lord's churches. It's also a mark separation. Truth and error must separate. “Well, we accept all teachings.” Well, then you can no longer stand for the truth, because truth and error must separate, it has to be. It is a mark of distinction, it's a mark of separation. It is also a mark of difference. Don't ever apologize for believing the truth. Don't ever apologize for the church for holding the truth. It's a mark of contrast, the pillar and ground of truth. It's a dividing line. “Where do we draw the line?” Truth is the line. You don't have to draw a line, the line is already drawn. Truth is the line. If the church is to be what people need, that distinction of truth must be maintained.

These descriptions of the church in 1st Timothy 3:15, reveal both the purpose and the responsibility of the church. We see God and truth. That's our purpose and responsibility. You'll notice also in this verse that God and truth have an impact on one's attitude. He says, “*that thou oughtest to know how to behave thyself in the house of God.*” God and

truth teaches us that there is a code of behavior in the Lord's house. There is a behavior. It's God's house. We have God and truth. Those are two distinctions. We must never blur the distinctions. We must never break down the distinctions. In the day of seeker sensitive churches, innovation is looked upon as more important than truth. Innovation is never more important than truth. Programs are looked upon as more important than truth. It's not more important, nor is it even on the same level. It is the truth that distinguishes us. That's why it's scary when people will make comments and say, "Doctrine, doctrine, doctrine." What are you saying? Do you realize what doctrine is? It's the truth. When you say, "Doctrine, doctrine, doctrine. That's all I hear. I'm tired of it," you're saying, "I'm tired of the truth." That's the whole mindset behind the seeker sensitive movement. Truth must have a standard. Truth is not relative, it is not subjective. That is, it is not determined by situations, it's not determined by people, it's not determined by culture. Truth is not ambiguous. That is, it is not doubtful, and it is not uncertain. Truth is definite. Truth is certain.

This truth must have a standard. That is, something has to determine what is true. Something has to determine what is true and what is not true. What is the standard? The standard is not man's opinions, reasoning, philosophies of man, it's not even the traditions of man. "Well, we've been doing that for 50 years!" Tradition does not determine truth. There are many traditions that are wrong, but that's a different message. Institutions of learning do not determine truth, they may proclaim truth, but they do not determine truth. Politicians and so-called experts do not determine truth. Hollywood and the entertainment industry does not determine truth. If you use Hollywood or the entertainment industry for an argument, you don't have much. They do not determine truth. Preachers do not determine truth. Religious institutions, Home Baptist Church, do not determine truth. Preachers are to proclaim truth, Home Baptist Church is to

proclaim truth, but we do not determine truth. Traditions do not determine truth.

What does determine truth? The Bible tells us that God is truth. Anything contrary to God is wrong. God is truth. Jesus said, in John 14:6, *“I am ... the truth”*. Jesus Christ is the truth. Anything contrary to Jesus Christ is not true. John 16:13, the Holy Spirit is said to be the spirit of truth who will guide you into the truth. The trinity, God the father, God the son, God the holy spirit, is truth. God's word is truth. John 17:17 says, *“... thy word is truth”*. Isaiah said in Isaiah 8:20, *“To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, [it is] because [there is] no light [or truth] in them.”* This is our standard for truth. God and God's word. Those two, God, (when I say God I mean God the father, God the son, God the Holy Spirit), and God's word never contradicts one another. They're always in agreement. That's why it's called God's word. This is our standard of truth. Whatever is contrary to these things, whatever is contrary to this book is a lie. Whatever is contrary to this book is incorrect, it is wrong, it is inaccurate, it is fabricated, it is fraudulent. If it is contrary to the word of God, it's not true. *“... let God be true and every man a liar;”*, is what we read in Romans 3:4. It doesn't matter how educated that “man” is, how nice of a fellow he is, or that he has good intentions, if he's contrary to what God says, he does not speak the truth. We see our standard for truth.

God draws very distinct, very clear, unmistakable lines between truth and error, between right and wrong. The mindset behind the seeker sensitive movement is to make truth acceptable. That's not our responsibility. Our responsibility is to sound it out, to declare it, to proclaim it, and to live it. We're not to seek to be loved. It's not our goal to be accepted and desired. Our goal is to declare the truth. That's why we're here, to declare the truth.

The church is to proclaim the truth, but, when the mindset of, “We want the world to love us, to accept us, to desire us, to just break our doors down where we don't have

enough room for them. We just want them to come”, makes inroads into the church, there is only one way to keep that going. You have to begin to view proclaiming of truth and truth itself differently. As soon as you get into that mindset, you have begun to view truth differently than you ever did before. That's very, very dangerous. Once you begin to view truth differently, the fearlessness, the courage, the steadfastness, the determination for truth begins to waver. Then there are attempts to change. “Well this person was turned off by this truth, so how can we word it a little differently? How can we phrase it a little differently where they won't get so angry?” You better be careful how you go rephrasing the truth. You better be careful when you start to alter the truth, because one alteration means it's no longer truth. The truth begins to be altered. You begin to make a few adjustments. “Well, Brother Dan, maybe you can say it this way”, or, “Well, that didn't work, lets try saying it this way”, and you begin to make adjustments. That's very dangerous and when that happens, the church is well on it's way to ceasing to be the church people need. They begin to tweak and to modify the truth. If you're working on a contract over something and you want to make some alterations, you want to make some adjustments, do a little tweaking, a little modifying, go right ahead. But, when it comes to God's word, we're not to modify it, we're not to tweak it, we're not to alter it, we're not to modify it. “Well, if we don't make some adjustments, they're not going to come.” That's not our business. That's God's business. We need to keep our businesses straight.

The truth is to be contended for. It distinguishes us. It's a dividing line. In Jude 3, Jude said, “*Beloved when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation*”, he says, I wanted to write to you about the truth of salvation, “*it was needful for me to write unto you and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith [meaning the truth]*”, then notice what it says, “*which was once delivered unto the saints.*” He says, “*that ye should*”,

which is an obligation, it means that it's advisable; “*ye should earnestly*”, that's indicative of intensity and conviction; “*ye should earnestly contend*”, that means there's a battle, “you should earnestly contend”, maintain, hold on to, and be assertive. We're not to be passive. *Earnestly contend*, that's assertive. When Jesus said in Matthew 16:8, “*the gates of hell shall not prevail against it*”. Do you realize gates are defenses? Gates do not attack anybody. Gates are there for defensive purposes. So that means what? That means the church is to be on the offense. “*the gates of hell shall not prevail against it*” means the gates shall not be able to stop the truth that the church declares.

We're to earnestly contend. “Well, we just want to get along with everybody.” Don't you see that truth and error can't get along. God's house and the devil's house can not get along. There is a contention. As soon as we say we're God's house, God's church, that immediately puts us at odds with everybody else. There is a contention. That means there is an opposition. If we are to earnestly contend for the truth or for the faith, those words imply that there is an enemy. If we have to contend there's an enemy.

It implies that there is opposition. Not everybody is going to love the truth, not everybody is going to hear the truth. Many are going to oppose it. What do we do in those times? When someone stands up and opposes the truth, what will we do? Do we make adjustments? Do we issue an apology? No! We're to earnestly contend. We're to earnestly contend for the faith. That enemy, that opposition is relentless and determined. We can not afford not to be relentless. We can not afford not to be determined in our contention for the truth.

In the midst of all the filth, in the midst of all the vileness, and the wickedness, and the ungodliness, and the abomination, in the midst of all the blasphemy, in the midst of all the heresy, we are to earnestly contend for the truth. How do we do that? We do that by standing for the truth, cleaving to the truth, proclaiming the truth, and living the

truth. It's not only our responsibility as a church to proclaim the truth, it's our responsibility as we go out in this world of wickedness to live the truth. That makes us different than all those around us.

When the goal is to make the ungodly feel comfortable, to feel satisfied, and happy, when the ungodly comes in we ought to pray, "Lord save their soul. Lord take the preached word today and bring it into their hearts, cause them to be born again and save their soul." That should be what we're praying. Not, "Lord ... Oh, I pray Lord that the pastor wouldn't say something today to run these people off. Oh Lord, don't let him say anything that's going to offend them." No, you pray that he preaches the truth and that the Lord will take the truth and save their soul. That's how we continue to be the church that people need. When all we're concerned about is what they thought, were they comfortable, were they satisfied, were they happy, we begin to some degree to set truth to the side. When we begin to set truth to the side, again my question is, where does that stop? It doesn't. It just snowballs.

Oh how we desire to be the church that people need. I believe we are, I believe we are a church that people need, not necessarily the church people want. We need to realize there is a danger out there, that we could very easily cease to be the church that people need. God help us to be the church that lost sinners need, that God's people need, that we do not adopt the mindset of the seeker sensitive movement. The seeker sensitive churches are not what threatens our existence. They could build one right next door. That would not be what threatens our existence. What threatens our existence is that we adopt their mindset, that we begin to think along the same lines. "Oh we don't want them to build a big church there that will take away from ...". Don't worry about it. That's not the danger. We have to protect our own hearts, our own minds from falling prey to an ungodly, compromising, un-biblical mindset.

Chapter 5

Maintaining a Distinction, Proclaim The Truth

“ ... This is an hard saying; who can
hear it?” – John 6:60

PROCLAIM THE TRUTH

This fifth message is the second part of the previous message, in which we learned that we have to maintain our distinction if we're going to be the church that people need. In 1st Timothy 3:15, the church is referred to as the house of God, the church of the living God, and the pillar in the ground of truth. Those three things speak loud and clear that there is a distinction between the Lord's church and all other religious institutions. That distinction must be maintained at all times in these days of seeker friendly, seeker sensitive churches. When the emphasis is upon giving people what they want, what is pleasing to the flesh, what is in line with their perceived needs and their notions of God, and presenting a message that is nonthreatening to their present belief system. The idea is, if they like you, if you can be popular, if you can be desirable, then that will attract them and they'll be saved. However, popularity has nothing to do with God saving a soul.

Our duty, our responsibility is not to make the truth acceptable, but to declare it, sound it out, proclaim it, and to live it. If we are going to maintain our distinction, we have to, at all times, proclaim the truth, making no alterations whatsoever. When you make enough alterations and adjustments to the truth, it soon ceases to be the message that people need. If it ceases to be the message that people need, that church ceases to be the church that people need.

I want to show Christ as our example in these things. In John 6:60-69, it says, *“Many therefore of his disciples, when they had heard this, said, This is an hard saying; who can hear it? When Jesus knew in himself that his disciples murmured at it, he said unto them, Doth this offend you? What and if ye shall see the Son of man ascend up where he was before? It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life. But there are some of you that believe not. For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were that believed not, and who should betray him. And he said, Therefore said I unto you, that no man can come unto me, except it were*

given unto him of my Father. From that time many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him. Then said Jesus unto the twelve, Will ye also go away? Then Simon Peter answered him, Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life. And we believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God.”

Leading up to these verses there was the miraculous feeding of well over five thousand people with five loaves and two small fishes. In John 6:14, the scriptures show that those who had seen the miracle, those who had experienced the miracle, we're now convinced that Jesus Christ was the Messiah that the Old Testament spoke of. John 6:14-15, says, *“Then those men, when they had seen the miracle that Jesus did, said, This is of a truth that prophet that should come into the world. When Jesus therefore perceived that they would come and take him by force, to make him a king, he departed again into a mountain himself alone.”* Jesus knew that these who had experienced this miracle would come and take him by force and make him a king. In John 6:22-24, it says, *“The day following, when the people which stood on the other side of the sea saw that there was none other boat there, save that one whereinto his disciples were entered, and that Jesus went not with his disciples into the boat, but [that] his disciples were gone away alone; (Howbeit there came other boats from Tiberias nigh unto the place where they did eat bread, after that the Lord had given thanks:) When the people therefore saw that Jesus was not there, neither his disciples, they also took shipping, and came to Capernaum, seeking for Jesus.”*

The following day of this miraculous feeding the people gathered. They are looking for Jesus Christ but he is nowhere to be found. This greatly perplexed them because on the previous evening, there was only one boat on that side of the sea, and they saw the apostles get in that boat alone and depart. So where was Jesus? They concluded that He must have miraculously got to the other side.

So this great multitude of people, (remember He fed five thousand men besides women and children,) make their way to the other side. We see they are seeking Jesus. That does not mean that they are seeking Christ as Savior. They had just experienced a miracle and now they are seeking Jesus. Remember, with the whole seeker sensitive movement, we have to appeal to the seeker. The question is, what are they seeking? Many who say they are seeking Jesus do so for the wrong reasons, which we will see here. Recently, I had someone call. They didn't ask what we believed, they asked if we had activities. Then they asked if there were single women between the ages of 40 and 60. That's all they cared about. Seeking, yes, but what were they seeking? So it is today.

All this multitude is seeking Christ. Beginning with John 6:26, Jesus begins to preach a message unto them. Did Jesus alter the message since these were seekers, or did Jesus simply preach the truth? Verse 26 says, "*Jesus answered them and said, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Ye seek me, not because ye saw the miracles, but because ye did eat of the loaves, and were filled.*"

I want to look at several things in the verses that we read. There is the reaction of the people to the message of Christ. They are called disciples because they are seeking Christ, which doesn't mean that they are saved.

First there is the reaction of the majority to the message of Christ in this passage of scripture. It was a reaction of intolerance. Notice John 6:60, we don't know how many of this group of over five thousand there were, but a huge multitude was now standing before Christ and Christ has preached to them, "*Many therefore of his disciples when they had heard this, said, This is an hard saying; who can hear it?*" When they came to Christ they heard something that they were not accustomed to hearing. They also heard something that they did not expect to hear. They thought the message of Christ was very difficult, quite puzzling, exhausting to their flesh, and very harsh. "*This is a hard*

saying.” They found it to be very stern, demanding, unpleasant, and uncomfortable. This is a message that caused them distress. It was a message that was unbending. They found the message of Christ to be intolerable. In John 6, Jesus could see how the people were receiving the message, He could see the distress they were in hearing what He was saying, but did Jesus at any time alter the message? No. He just continued to deliver the truth.

We see also that it was a reaction of murmuring and grumbling. In John 6:61, *“When Jesus knew in himself that his disciples murmured at it ...”* When Jesus preached, they began to complain and gripe about what He was saying. The fact that they murmured indicates that they're not happy. Happy people do not murmur. Jesus has not gotten with the program of the seeker sensitive movement. These people were not happy, they were not comfortable, and they were not satisfied. The message was not to their liking. You murmur when something is not to your liking. This message was distasteful and unappealing to them. The question is, did Jesus, anywhere, at any time alter the message? No, He never did.

We also see that it was a reaction of offense. In John 6:61, the people are murmuring, and Jesus didn't say unto them, “I'm sorry I didn't mean to hurt you, I didn't mean to make you uncomfortable. Let me try to present it a different way. Let me try to present it in a way where you won't be offended.” He just asked them a question, “Does this offend you?” What I have said to you, does this offend you? When someone is offended they are insulted. The truth that Jesus preached and taught here offended and it insulted them. When you are offended, you feel that you have been wronged. These people felt that they had been wronged by the truth that Jesus had presented. Sometimes when you are offended there may be outrage and resentment. This was how these people reacted to the truth of Jesus Christ. They were offended.

All of this would lead to a withdrawal. In verse 66, *“From that time many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him.”* They didn't just go away, they stayed away. They never came back. They were offended at the truth that Jesus preached, and being offended, they withdrew. They found the message so difficult, so unbearable, so distasteful, so unappealing, and they were so insulted, they felt so wronged and outraged, that they left. In fact, the only ones remaining were twelve, and one of them was lost. The rest of the thousands that were there, left.

Why did they react this way? Had Jesus done something wrong that would cause them to react this way? The reaction was to the preaching and the teaching of the truth. It was simply what Jesus said that caused this departure. Now if a preacher today had thousands of people that he was preaching to, (and no doubt there were thousands here,) and by the time he got done with his message, there were only twelve left, that preacher would be looking for a different church, I guarantee it. He's an utter failure in the minds of most people. That is why it's not the seeker sensitive church that's the danger, it's that whole thought process behind the whole movement. That's the danger.

They reacted this way to the truth. What did He preach that would cause such a strong reaction? Back up to John 6:27, we see He began by telling them that the spiritual was more important than the material. He says, *“Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, ...”* He stressed spiritual things. Anything wrong with that? No, nothing wrong with that. But this was the reaction.

He had preached and taught concerning Himself. John 6:27 again, He says, *“... the Son of man shall give unto you: for him hath God the Father sealed.”* He said in verse 29, *“... believe on him whom he hath sent.”* He says, Jesus Christ is the one that God the father has sealed. Jesus is the one that God the father has sent. This is the message that He's preaching. John 6:32, says, *“Then Jesus said unto*

them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Moses gave you not that bread from heaven; but my Father giveth you the true bread from heaven", which is referring again to Jesus Christ. Verse 35, *"And Jesus said unto them, I am the bread of life: ..."* He is stressing the spiritual.

He is also stressing the person of Jesus Christ. John 6:48, He again says, *"I am that bread of life."* Verse 51, He says, *"I am the living bread which came down from heaven: ..."* The message was a message about Jesus Christ. The message was about this "I am more than a miracle worker. I am what you need. I am the bread of life." And if you tell people today that Jesus Christ is the one they need, He is the only one that can help them, that message is unbearable, that message is offensive to many. Many are going to leave. Just preaching Christ will cause many to leave.

He also preached the sovereignty of God. He put God on the throne in His preaching. He took the crown off of sinful man and put it upon the head of God. They found that to be unbearable, painful, distasteful, and very unappealing. They were insulted, wronged, outraged, they felt resentment, and they left. In John 6:63 He told them *"... the flesh profiteth nothing: ..."*, it's the spirit. Look at verse 63, *"It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing:"* They couldn't take that. He's preaching the sovereignty of God.

He is preaching Christ, He is preaching the sovereignty of God, but He also preaches the total depravity and the inability of man to save himself. Man doesn't mind hearing that he needs to be saved as long as you leave him to believe that he can save himself. What man gets upset about is that he can do NOTHING to save himself, that only Christ can save him. In John 6:44, He said, *"No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: ..."* He's preaching the depravity of man. He's preaching the sovereignty of God. He presents man in the gutter of his depravity. He presents that man is dead in trespasses and sins. That he's depraved, corrupt, and unable to rise up in his

own strength and come to God. You know what? That message didn't go over any better then than it does now. You still get the same response to that message today. He told them that the flesh profited nothing. He told them the truth about themselves.

As you read through John 6, you see that Jesus spoke in very certain terms. He left no room for their beliefs. It's just simply what he said. That's the way the word of God is to be presented. It is to be preached in very certain terms, leaving no room for personal opinion. It's just simply, "This is what God has said."

They've heard this message, but this isn't what they came to hear. There will be many, and there have been many, through the years of Home Baptist Church, that have come in these doors, and they heard a message that they didn't come to hear. They heard a message that they did not expect to hear. They left and some of them, you haven't seen since. They left simply because the truth was offensive to them.

Jesus preached that salvation was only in and through Him. Notice John 6:47, He said, "... *He that believeth on me hath everlasting life.*" Verses 49-51 say, "*Your fathers did eat manna in the wilderness, and are dead. This is the bread which cometh down from heaven, that a man may eat thereof, and not die. ... if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever: ...*" He's telling them, I am your only hope. Then in verse 53, "*Then Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you.*" In other words, you're damned, you're condemned without Jesus Christ. That offends people. People find that very, very offensive.

Jesus is not preaching anything that is not true. He's not preaching anything that we don't preach today. He's preaching Jesus Christ, the depravity of man, and that salvation is only in and through Christ. People were offended. You can preach works and that satisfies people. It satisfies people to believe, "I have to do something to be saved." I mean, it's more satisfying to people if you tell

them, “You have to crawl 20 miles on your hands and knees on broken glass.” That will not offend them as much as telling them, “There is only one way and that's Jesus Christ.” Now they're going to get offended.

People don't mind hearing about works. They want to know that they can do something. You can preach baptism. Many have and they've started their own denominations. You can preach baptism and that will not offend people. You can preach church membership or you can preach a social gospel, and people will applaud, and will feel good. But you preach Jesus, as the one and only way of salvation, and the majority of people find that message too intolerable.

Jesus also preached and taught total commitment of those who knew Jesus Christ. Notice John 6:57, “*As the living Father hath sent me, and I live by the Father: so he that eateth me, even he shall live by me.*” That's commitment. People don't want to hear anything about commitment today. They don't want to hear anything about surrender. That's unappealing to them. It's not what they want to hear.

Their reaction was not only to the message of Jesus Christ, their reaction was to the person of Jesus Christ. That's always so, because it's His message. You reject the message, you're not just rejecting the message, you're rejecting the person Jesus Christ. John 6:66, again, says they, “... *went back, and walked no more with him.*” He was the one that they were rejecting. You can not separate the message of the book from the person of Jesus Christ. They deserted Christ. They relinquished all attendance upon His ministry. They disowned all attachment to His person. They threw off all His authority. They not only disregarded His teaching, they disregarded him.

Why did they act this way? One reason is because they had a wrong perception of Jesus Christ. In John 6:15, they desired to come, take Him by force, and make Him a king. Before Jesus preached they had this idea that they

could do with Jesus Christ as they pleased. “If we want to make Him a king, we will.” That's what folks believe today. As long as God, as long as Jesus Christ is somebody that they can do with what they please, they're not offended. They thought that they could fit Him into their own little box. As Jesus preached this message they found out that Christ did not fit into what they thought. Christ did not fit into their perception, Christ did not fit into their plan, Christ was not somebody that they could control. Christ was not somebody that they could shape and mold, and therefore they were offended. So offended, that they left.

They also had a wrong motive for seeking Jesus Christ. John 6:26, “*Jesus answered them and said, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Ye seek me, not because ye saw the miracles, but because ye did eat of the loaves, and were filled.*” They were blind to the spiritual significance of Christ. The only thing they saw was, “This man fed us.” The only thing they saw was temporal and material. They were there to get something to satisfy their flesh. When Jesus Christ did not satisfy their flesh, they were offended. When the message did not satisfy their flesh, they were offended. The whole seeker sensitive movement is, “Satisfy the people. Satisfy the seekers.” These people were looking for something that would satisfy themselves. They were looking for something that would make them feel good about themselves, and they basically saw Jesus as a “meal ticket” for their physical needs. When they found out that that wasn't the case, they were offended.

They wanted Jesus Christ to do something sensational. “Feed us again!” They wanted Jesus Christ to do something spectacular. They wanted something that would impress them. They wanted some excitement. Don't you think that that was an exciting time when Jesus fed over five thousand? Certainly it was, and they wanted more of that. “We want excitement.” The message that Jesus preached didn't give them any of that and they were offended. They were only interested in what they could get

from Jesus without any concern for His glory, without any concern for His will. They wanted something from Him, and they would set the terms. When they found that it didn't work that way, they were offended.

They were opposed to the truth. That is another reason they were offended. They were opposed to the claims of Jesus Christ. They were disciples in name only. John 6:64, says, *“But there are some of you that believe not. ...”*, that's very pointed, *“... For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were that believed not, and who should betray him.”* In other words, all of these people had no personal relationship to Jesus Christ. They had no close association to Jesus Christ. They had a name, and that's all they had. They had no close contact, warm friendship, or kinship with Jesus Christ. What happens, when you present the truth and people have no relationship, no closeness to Jesus Christ, and no personal contact with Jesus Christ, is they leave. That's what happened here. If you think about it, you can not build a church upon the foundation of a people who have no relationship with Jesus Christ. I don't care how happy the message makes them, if they have no relationship to Jesus Christ, you have nothing. That's what many are trying to build upon today.

What did Jesus do on this occasion? At the beginning of the chapter, over five thousand people are seen following Christ. They're listening to Him. By the end of the chapter, there are only twelve left, and one of them is unsaved. In the eyes of the religious world, John 6 is perhaps the most unsuccessful sermon preached in the history of man. You have thousands of people. “Oh what an opportunity pastor. You've got to be careful now, you've got thousands of people. Take advantage of this opportunity.” He did, He preached the truth and everybody left with the exceptions of twelve. “Oh what a failure”, is how the religious world would look at this.

But the Lord never failed in anything. The Lord was never unsuccessful in anything. I say to you that this was a

successful message. It did exactly what Jesus intended it to do, because Jesus never did anything that wasn't successful. What we have to realize is sometimes the Lord uses preaching to weed out. He doesn't just use preaching to bring in, he uses preaching, many times, to weed out. Wherever there's sheep there's goats, wherever there's wheat there's tares. You just keep preaching the truth and the Lord has a way of weeding out.

Jesus could see that the people were upset as he was preaching and when they left, He did not change, He did not alter the message. He did not attempt to make it more desirable nor must we. We must simply preach the truth. He did not attempt to tone it down. “Well maybe pastor if you just tone it down a little, you can say the same thing, but just tone it down a little. Try to approach it from a different way.” Is that what Jesus did? No. He just preached the truth.

He did not seek to cater to those who found the message intolerable and offensive. What happens many times today, is churches cater to those who find the message offensive more than they do to those who find it appealing. Something is terribly wrong with that mindset. This whole chapter (John 6) is a sharp rebuke to the whole seeker friendly, seeker sensitive movement. Jesus did not attempt to build upon popularity. He had over five thousand people following Him. In the eyes of the religious world, “If He just would have toned it down a little, what a following he would have had”. He wasn't interested in popularity. He was interested in presenting the truth.

If you want a crowd, the seeker sensitive movement model, it will work. If a church wants a crowd, study the seeker sensitive movement, it will work. It will get you a crowd. But that's all you'll have. If you want solid, sincere, mature followers of Christ, if you want to be the church that people need, then you just keep holding onto the truth, and you keep on proclaiming the truth for His honor and His

glory no matter how many people leave. You just preach the truth.

When people find the message of the truth to be intolerable, unbearable, when they are offended by the truth of God, when they murmur, complain, and grumble at the truth of God, don't cater to them, don't apologize, don't pamper them. Here's what you do. You keep on loving them, you keep praying for them, and you keep on standing for the truth. You don't move one inch and you just keep on praying that God would get a hold of their heart.

What did Jesus do after the masses left? He turned to the twelve and he said, "*Will ye also go away?*" This was a call to examination. Can you imagine what went through their minds as all these people left in mass. Jesus asked them a question that would cause them to examine themselves. The answer that Peter gave, "*... to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life.*" Lord, we don't have any place else to go. That's true today, of those that believe and practice the truth. Where are you going to go? If you leave Christ, where are you going to go? Think of all of those that you have seen get offended and leave Christ. Where are they now? They walk no more with Him.

Christ is the only one. I ask you, if the truth offends you, if you leave Him, where are you going to go? You're going to go down a road to destruction. My point is, we must maintain our distinction. One of the distinctions is truth. You can not waver from truth. You stand for truth matter what it costs. That's the only way you can be the church that people need.

People need the truth today. They don't need to be told a bunch of lies. They don't need to be told things just to make them feel good. They need to be told the truth. They will receive it or they will reject it. That's the only two things you can do. It's not our business, nor is it in our capability to cause them to receive it. That's God's business. Our business is to stand for the truth, preach the truth.

PROCLAIM THE TRUTH

There are fewer and fewer people all the time preaching the truth. It is rare. This is not mainstream. What we have here is not mainstream. People come in here, and they hear things that they've never heard in their life. They're shocked. Some come back. They want to see what the nuts are going to do next. "What are these crazy people going to do next?" They come back out of curiosity. The Lord may save them. The Lord does bring them back. There are some who leave and we never see them again. But, we can't get so sidetracked where we begin to think, "Well we've got to keep them from leaving." To keep them from leaving, you have to do something to keep them to stay. Doing so will cause you to cease to be the church that they need. You've now become the church they want, not the church they need. God help us that we would never be the church that people want, but the church they need.

Chapter 6

Maintaining a Proper Objective

“Unto him [be] glory in the church ...”
– Ephesians 3:21

Continuing in this series, it ought to be our desire to always be the kind of church that people need. As we've learned so far, we must always remember that the churches of the Lord are distinct. They are separate, they are different, and they are in sharp contrast compared with the philosophies, reasoning, and the pursuits of not only the world, but also with what would be considered the religious mainstream today. The Lord's church is radically different from everything that is man made. Jesus said in Matthew 16:18, "*I will build my church,*" shows that His church is distinct by design. In 1st Timothy 3:15, Paul referred to the Lord's church as the house of God, the church of the living God, the pillar and the ground of truth, indicating that it is distinct by design. It is also distinct in its purpose and function. It's unlike any other organization upon the face of the earth. If we're going to be the church that people need, this God ordained distinction must be maintained. The church must not follow the allurements of our contemporary culture, allowing ourselves to become just another religious organization. If a church of the Lord Jesus Christ begins to mingle, merge, harmonize, be compatible with the world, or we begin to harmonize and become comparable with modern day Christendom, we lose our distinction. Once we've lost our distinction, we cease to be the church that people need. This distinction must be maintained.

In this message I will cover maintaining a proper objective. If we're going to maintain our distinction, remain separate, remain different, we have to maintain a proper objective. In Ephesians 3:21, it says, "*Unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen.*" I want to consider, first of all, the importance of having a proper objective. In considering the importance of having a proper objective, we also see the danger of having an improper objective.

An objective is something that we aim for, something that we strive to achieve. It is the end in view. An objective

becomes our ambition, our aspiration, our object of quest, the thing that we are seeking after.

Where there is an objective, whether it's a proper objective or improper, there are means and methods that are adopted to reach that objective. Whatever our objective is in life, as individuals, we have means and methods of reaching that objective. A company has an objective. They have means and methods of reaching that objective. An objective becomes a determining factor of means and methods that we use. Therefore, it is of extreme importance that we have a proper objective, because it determines the means and methods that we use. It also shows the danger of an improper objective.

In Jeremiah 2:33, we read, “*Why trimmest thou thy way to seek love?*” Remember, to trim means adding to or removing from. As you trim a bush you take away, but at the same time you could say “All the trimmings”, which adds to. It is a subtracting from and an adding to. That is a means or method.

What was their objective in Jeremiah 2:33? Their objective was to seek love, to be loved, and accepted. It was a very wicked time. Jeremiah goes on to say “... *therefore hasth thou also taught the wicked ones thy ways.*” In order to be loved, they took the things of God and they took away from the things of God or in some cases they added to the things of God. They had an improper objective, that being, “We want to be loved, we want to be accepted.” In order to achieve that, you have to also have un-biblical means and un-biblical methods to achieve your objective. It is of extreme importance that we always have a proper objective.

When the objective of a church is to be loved and accepted by the world, it is guaranteed they will adopt un-biblical methods in order to achieve that objective. When a church goes down that road, they're on their way to ceasing to be, not only the church that people need, but ceasing to be a church of the Lord Jesus Christ.

If it is the objective of a church to lure and attract a crowd, that church will begin to adopt means and methods that will give them a crowd. We've seen this, of course, through the last several decades. Many think it is the objective of the church to see souls saved. You say, "Well that's a good objective." It really isn't. That's not to be our objective. Churches brag, "Our goal, our objective, the only reason we are here is to see souls saved." Well the problem with that is, you adopt means and methods to get it done. This is what has resulted in reducing salvation to a decision. "Make a decision for Christ." In their mind, the more decisions they get, the more souls that have been saved, and they have reached their objective.

They simplify salvation so much that they really cease to teach and preach the gospel. They preach another gospel. This is what has led to "repeat a form" prayer. "All you have to do is repeat this prayer." You look at 99% of tracts that are out there today and on the back of them is, "Repeat this prayer." That's blasphemy and that's heresy. An individual has repeated a prayer. What do they do after they've repeated a prayer? They go to the same bar they went to last week because nothing has changed. All they have done is repeated a prayer. We can mark another one up, another soul has been saved. "We're reaching our goal." Churches will set goals, "We want to see four hundred souls saved this year. This is our goal." What happens? You begin to adopt means and methods to reach that goal.

All of this has resulted in churches being filled with the unsaved who live no differently than the world or who live their lives differently from the world but it is strictly works based righteousness. When I use the term churches now, I'm using it very loosely. I'm talking about religious buildings. It causes the buildings to be filled. They are factory made Christians. Christian schools have a habit of producing factory made Christians. This isn't a slam against Christian schools. I'm not saying that you shouldn't send your kids to one. That's not what I'm saying. The Armenian

churches are the same thing. Because their goal is to see souls saved. Don't misunderstand me, I'm not against seeing souls saved, but that's not our goal. That is not the objective.

That is what has brought salvation down. They'll say salvation is as simple as A, B, C ... Accept, Believe and Confess. That's all you have to do and you're saved. You won't find that in the word of God. These individuals will say, "We want to see souls saved, but it's for God's glory." Well if it's for God's glory, then do it God's way. Preach His word and leave the results with God. That's God's way. But let's be honest, it's not for God's glory. It's to see how many we can run through the baptistery, see how many souls we get saved in a year. It's sad.

An example of maintaining a proper objective in evangelism. In Mark 10:17, we read the story of the rich young ruler. *"And when Jesus was gone forth into the way, there came one running, ..." this man was excited, "... and kneeled to him, and asked him, Good Master, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?"* This man wanted to be saved. He had a wrong idea concerning it, but he had some desire for salvation. He was eager. He knelt down before Christ. What did Jesus do? "Well, young man all you have to do is accept, believe, and confess and it's done." That's not what He did. Did Jesus say, "Well, just repeat this prayer"? Not at all. Jesus immediately presented the law of God to him, because it's the law of God that brings conviction of sin. The first thing Jesus did was preach concerning God's character in Mark 10:18, *"And Jesus said unto him, Why callest thou me good? there is none good but one, that is, God."* So here's a man, "What must, what can I do to be saved?" Jesus immediately presents to him the character of God. Then He goes on in verse 19, *"Thou knowest the commandments"*, He's presenting the law to him now, *"Do not commit adultery, Do not kill, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Defraud not, Honor thy father and mother."* Jesus declared or He preached God's character, He preached God's law. Verse 20 the young man says, *"And he*

answered and said unto him, Master, all these have I observed from my youth.” He’s telling Jesus “I haven’t broken the law.” The preacher today would say, “That’s good just accept, believe, and confess and we’re all set.” But this man had to realize that he was a sinner.

Jesus goes on, *“beholding him loved him, and said unto him, One thing thou lackest: go thy way, sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor”*. I believe that’s repentance. Jesus is preaching to him repentance. This man had a problem with covetousness, and Jesus is telling him to repent. Someone comes, “I want to be saved.” “Repent, turn from your sins”, is what Jesus is telling him. Then He goes on in the last part of verse 21, *“... take up the cross, and follow ...”* Jesus says, come take up the cross, *“... and follow me.”* That is, he had to exercise faith toward Christ. Verse 22, *“And he was sad at that saying, and went away grieved: for he had great possessions.”* Jesus let this one go. This man would have not gotten away from the Armenian today. This man would have been forced to repeat a prayer. He would not have gone away. If someone comes running and kneels down, “I want to be saved”, the Armenian today is not going to let him get away. This man is going to be saved. But Jesus just kept preaching the word.

He went on to explain to the disciples in verses 24, *“the disciples were astonished at his words. But Jesus answereth again, and saith unto them, Children, how hard is it for them that trust in riches, ...”* This was this man’s problem. *“... to enter into the kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.”* People today try to make it so easy that they do away with the fact that it is a miracle. It is a miracle for a camel to go through the eye of a needle. Yet, many are making salvation as simple as A, B, C.

Jesus goes on, *“And they were astonished out of measure, saying among themselves, Who then can be saved? And Jesus looking upon them saith, With men it is impossible, but not with God: for with God all things are possible.”*

Salvation is never to be reduced to anything less than a miracle of God. It is not a decision. It is not a prayer. It is the miraculous working power of God upon a soul. When the objective becomes salvation, we lose sight of God's glory and then we begin to adopt means and methods to get them in, and means and methods to get them down the aisle. Churches today use all kinds of means and methods. "Get them down the aisle and then we'll have our counselors deal with them." In other words, "We'll have our counselors put some pressure on them and they'll say a prayer and we can count that toward how ever many souls we want to see saved this year." That's pitiful.

Notice the foundation of this objective. In Ephesians 3:21, Paul said, "*Unto Him be glory in the church ...*" Two key words are, "unto Him". That's the foundation of our objective. Unto Him. He's the center, He's the purpose, He's the foundation of our objective. The objective is to give Him glory. *Unto Him be glory*. This is what Paul was talking about in 2nd Corinthians 4:5. He said, "*For we preach not ourselves but Christ Jesus the Lord; ...*" Not ourselves but Christ Jesus. Whether it be true individually, whether it be true collectively, as a church, when we lose sight of who it's about, we cease to be the church that people need.

In Psalm 100:3, notice a couple phrases. "*Know ye that the LORD He is God: ...*" Now notice the next 3 words, "*... it is he ...*" Then go a few words further and we read, "*... and not we ...*" It is He and not we. He's talking here about creation, "*... it is he that hath made us, and not we ourselves; ...*" But, you take those 2 phrases, "*it is he*" and "*not ourselves*", and that is to always to be so. That's what will keep us distinct, it's He. It's all about Him. It's not about us, it's not about Home Baptist Church, it's about Him.

Notice in Psalm 115:1, "*... not unto us ...*" then notice, "*... but unto thy name ...*" Not unto us, but unto thy name. This is the foundation of our objective. It's about Him. It's not about how many people are baptized, how many professions of faith are made, how many little children

in Sunday school repeat a prayer. It's not about us. It's about God. It's all about God. "Well don't you think that God is pleased when little Johnny repeats a prayer?" No! I don't think he is. Not at all, because little Johnny has been deceived into thinking he's saved when he isn't. The church feels good about themselves, because, "We're getting closer to our goals." It's not about us, it's about God. So, "unto Him", if this breaks down, everything falls. It has to remain, unto Him. As soon as that breaks down, the church begins to pursue their own ends, their own means, their own methods, to achieve whatever their ends, whatever their goal, whatever their objective is.

Let's look at the objective. Paul said, "*Unto him be glory in the church ...*" The word "glory" there refers to an act done by us toward Him. The word glory conveys the idea of praise, tribute, gratitude, and homage. This is to be our aim, our ambition, our aspiration, the quest of the church, that in everything we do, God is praised, God is given honor, God is given glory, God is given tribute, God is given homage. In everything, unto Him be glory.

The word glory means to honor, to exalt God. It's not our achievements. We're simply to honor and exalt God. That is, as a church it is our duty to elevate God, it is our duty to promote God. You're not going to get a crowd today by promoting the God of the Bible. It's not going to happen. The world does not want to hear about the God of the Bible. The world wants to hear about a God that does not threaten their current belief system. That's not the God of the Bible. It is our duty as a church to uplift God. It is our duty as a church to exalt God, to honor God, to elevate God, to promote God. That is, when people walk in the door, it's not about activities, it's not about all the other things that go on in various places. It's about God. It's all about God. That must always be our objective, aim, ambition, and aspiration. That is what our quest is. It's to honor, to exalt, to promote God, in everything that we do.

It is our duty, it is our responsibility as a church to show forth the greatness of God. You know what happens when you show forth the greatness of God? Man is brought down to nothing. People don't like that today. Exalt God and man automatically is brought down to nothing. We are to draw attention to God. The messages are to draw attention to God. Worship is to have our attention on God. It's not to fill our time with a bunch of programs and a bunch of nonsense, then have enough time for a 5 or 10 minute message. That has nothing to do with God. That's entertainment. When a church gets into the entertainment industry, when the church begins to compete with the world for entertainment, they're going to lose every single time. You can't compete with the world. No church can. They fail every time. That's why they've got to keep going for more and more and more. We have to keep our focus.

The design of the church is to showcase the breathtaking beauty of God. "Well, so and so might get angry, they might leave, they might never come back." That's true. But, you see, our responsibility is to showcase God, to promote God. If they walk out of here and they never come back again, as long as we have done what God has told us to do, we have nothing to apologize for. Nothing at all. If somebody has been rude to somebody and caused them to leave, that's a different story. But, we're talking about, if we just do what we're supposed to do, many are going to leave. The church is not to apologize for that.

Our responsibility is to draw attention to God, and we're to concentrate all of our energies on glorifying the Lord. That's the reason behind everything that we do. Everything that we do is to point to Him. This isn't what the world wants, but it is what the world needs. Everybody that walks in these doors needs the Lord. I'm not saying that everyone that walks in the door is lost, but everyone that walks in these doors needs the Lord. That's what we're to present, is the Lord. That's what they need. They may think they need a lot of other things. But, we're not here to meet

the perceived needs of the world. We're here to point them to their need, which is the Lord.

In Romans 11, Galatians 1, Philippians 4:20, 1st Timothy 1:17, 1st Timothy 6:16, and on and on we could go. We read the words “unto Him be glory”. Every one of those verses, just like Ephesians 3:21, ends with the word, “*Amen*”. Unto Him be glory ... amen. That word “amen” is expressive of the desire of the heart. That should be the desire of every member of Home Baptist Church, unto Him be glory. We all may have various opinions about a lot of things that don't matter in the big picture. We need to have enough spirituality about us, enough spiritual maturity about us, “this is my opinion, but unto Him be glory, amen”, and leave it at that. Just be satisfied that God gets the glory.

The word amen is a word of belief. When we say “amen”, we are saying “I believe that”. When we read “unto Him amen”, we are saying I believe that. He's to get the glory.

When we say amen, that is a word to express joy in our hearts, unto Him be glory, amen. It ought to give us joy in our hearts when God is glorified, when God is exalted, when God is promoted, no matter what the results of that is, it ought to rejoice our hearts that God has been glorified. Unto Him be glory, amen.

That's also a word of resolution. We say amen, in other words, “I resolve to do that, I agree with that.” That ought to be the resolution of everyone of us. If we're going to continue to be the church that people need, “unto Him be glory in the church” must be maintained at all costs.

Just like people, churches have trials. Churches go through seasons of trials. Just like individuals, churches have particular obstacles that they have to deal with. They have particular hurdles that they have to deal with. We may have some obstacles that another church doesn't have. They may have some obstacles that we don't have. My point is, churches have obstacles.

Churches also have temptations. As individuals, we have temptations. The church is made up of individuals. Churches have temptations. Every now and then a church might be tempted, “Well if we just let down here, we can get this one in. If we let down over here we can get this other one in.” Churches have temptations. But you just keep in mind all through the temptations, “unto Him be glory”. Unto Him be glory in the church. “Well if we just let down here, God would be glorified if this one comes in.” If God would be glorified if this one comes in, guess what? God can bring them in. You don't have to change anything to get them. You just preach, do what God tells you to do, and if God wants them here, He'll bring them in. That's just the simple truth.

It doesn't matter what any other church does, either. Off and on, for thirty-five years I've been hearing that. “Well you know down there, they do this.” What's your point? I know what the point is, “You know maybe we should consider that.” No! What other churches do, whether they be of like faith or not, should have no effect upon what we do. Unto Him glory. That needs to be our constant model. No matter what is popular. What is popular today may not be popular tomorrow. No matter what is popular, accepted, or approved by the religious world, this is our objective, unto Him be glory.

All my ministry, I've dealt with, “Well you know, Brother Dan, brother so and so doesn't see it that way, brother so and so thinks it's OK.” That doesn't mean anything to me. It has no bearing upon what we do. None whatsoever. We just have to, “unto Him be glory.” And the only way you can glorify God is to do it God's way. This must be insisted upon, “unto Him be glory” in the church.

This becomes our individual responsibility. It's the individual responsibility of each and every member unto Him be glory in the church. Churches can receive pressure from outside, though most of the pressure doesn't come from the outside. Churches can receive pressure from within from

time to time. Unto Him be glory, just keep that in mind. You must never get away from your objective, “unto Him be glory in the church.” That must always be our ambition, aspiration, the continual quest of Home Baptist Church, unto Him be Glory. That's our blueprint, unto Him be glory. All the glory goes to Him. If we keep this objective in mind, that keeps our means, that keeps our methods within the framework of biblical standards. That's all we have to do, keep our means and our methods within the framework of biblical standards. Keep our means and methods in line with God's word. We do that, we will continue to be the church that people need.

We're not interested in getting with the times. We're interested in remaining distinct, separate, and different. To do that, all we have to do is to do what God says. In every aspect. When it comes to worship, preaching, and evangelizing, unto Him be glory. When it comes to telling the lost about their needs for Christ, when it comes to appointing people into offices or as Sunday school teachers, and all of these things, unto Him be glory. When it comes to calling a pastor, unto Him be glory. You can't be wrong. You just remember your objective. Churches get messed up and they say, “Well, you know our next pastor, we want somebody young”, or “Our next pastor we want somebody older.” It ought to be unto Him be glory in everything we do. “Well this one would make a good Sunday school teacher, this one would make a good whatever.” Unto Him be glory. It's all about Him.

If we're going to continue to be the church that people need we must maintain our objective. Our objective is never to change. No matter what. Two weeks from now, a week from now, by next Sunday, this church can be in turmoil. It can happen very quickly. It can happen overnight. It only takes one person. It only takes one person in a church to just cause all kinds of turmoil. Whatever happens, as long as the bulk of the membership says, “We're going to exalt God. We're going to do it God's way. Now the rest of you, you do

whatever you want, but you're going to have to go somewhere else to do it. We're going to do it God's way.”

That needs to always be, no matter what or the turmoil is. We've been blessed. We haven't had a lot of turmoil, but that can change. If it does, we have to keep our same objective. Unto Him be glory. We're just going to keep doing it God's way. God will work it out. God's way works. That's true individually and as a church. We must do it God's way.

Chapter 7

Maintaining Being Consistent

“... they ceased not to teach and preach
Jesus Christ.”
– Acts 5:42

MAINTAINING BEING CONSISTENT

In Acts 5:25, it says, *“Then came one and told them, saying, Behold, the men whom ye put in prison are standing in the temple, and teaching the people.”* Acts 5:42, says *“And daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ.”* Overall we've seen that in order to be the church that people need, there must be a maintaining of the distinction that God has given to His churches. The church must never become the world under any circumstances. With that being said, I'd like to show that there must be a maintaining of biblical consistency if we're going to be the church that people need.

Consistency speaks of that which is constant, regular, steadiness, dependability, reliability. The Lord's churches, of course, are put here to do the Lord's business the Lord's way. They ought to be consistent in doing the Lord's business. There never ought to be any wavering, when doing the business of the Lord. As the church goes through the process of time and through the various circumstances that a church will experience, they must with regularity, with steadiness be found doing the Lord's business the Lord's way. God's people and the lost world ought to be able to depend and rely upon the Lord's church to be doing the Lord's business as usual, no matter what. No matter what happens, the Lord's church is to just continue to do the Lord's business as usual.

In the book of Acts, the Jerusalem church, serves as an example of this consistency that we want to speak upon in this message. Leading up to the verses that we read in Acts 5, we see Peter and John healing a lame man in the temple. In Acts 3:11, we see them in the temple at Solomon's porch. Further on in Acts 4:1-4, Peter is seen speaking to the people. The people he's speaking to are those who were curious about the miracle of the lame man being healed. We see that he preaches to them in Acts 4:3, we see that Peter and John are arrested for preaching the word of God.

They are then brought before the Sanhedrin and in Acts 4:7 we read, *“And when they had set them in the midst, they asked, By what power, or by what name, have ye done*

this?” That is, “Where do you get your authority to do what you've done, by what name, by what power.” In verse 10 they answer, “Be it known unto you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, even by him doth this man stand here before you whole.” Verses 12-14, “Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved. Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men, they marveled; and they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus. And beholding the man which was healed standing with them, they could say nothing against it.” If you go verse 18, the Sanhedrin called Peter, James, and John, and “... commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus. But Peter and John answered and said unto them, Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye. For we cannot but speak ...”, that is we can't help ourselves, “... the things which we have seen and heard.”

They tell Peter and John don't go back there, do not preach, do not teach, do not mention the name of Christ again. Then in Acts 4:23, they've let Peter and John go and “... they went to their own company, and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said unto them.” We see the people there praising the Lord. Then in Acts 5:12, we see them back in Solomon's porch, “And by the hands of the apostles were many signs and wonders wrought among the people; (and they were all with one accord in Solomon's porch.”

Then in Acts 5:17-20, “Then the high priest rose up, and all they that were with him, (which is the sect of the Sadducees,) and were filled with indignation, And laid their hands on the apostles, and put them in the common prison. But the angel of the Lord by night opened the prison doors, and brought them forth, and said, Go, stand and speak in the temple to the people all the words of this life.” They're cast

into prison, the Lord sets them free, tells them you go back to the temple, and you preach Jesus Christ. Again, the Sanhedrin has commanded them not to do so.

Then in verses 22-25, *“But when the officers came, and found them not in the prison, they returned, and told, Saying, The prison truly found we shut with all safety, and the keepers standing without before the doors: but when we had opened, we found no man within. Now when the high priest and the captain of the temple and the chief priests heard these things, they doubted of them whereunto this would grow. Then came one and told them, saying, Behold, the men whom ye put in prison are standing in the temple, and teaching the people.”* They are back in the temple, and they are doing the very thing they were commanded not to do. This man comes and he says, “You know those men whom you warned, whom you commanded not to preach Jesus Christ, those men that you arrested, those men you punished, well ... they have escaped and those very same men are right back in the same place, doing the same things, preaching the same message.” That's consistency. A church, if it's going to continue to be what people need, must be the same people, in the same place, doing the same things, preaching the same message. That must always be so.

Then in Acts 5:27-29, *“And when they had brought them, they set them before the council: and the high priest asked them, Saying, Did not we straightly command you that ye should not teach in this name? and, behold, ye have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this man's blood upon us. Then Peter and the other apostles answered and said, We ought to obey God rather than men.”* Verse 40, *“And to him they agreed: and when they had called the apostles, and beaten them, they commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go.”* They again give command, they beat them, they let them go. Verse 41, *“And they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name. And daily in the temple, and in every house, they*

ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ.” Over and over again, under very trying, very difficult circumstances and in the face of ferrous hostility and opposition, we see the same people, in the same place, doing the same thing, preaching the same message. They could not be deterred nor distracted. They were consistently doing what God had told them to do. If we are going to be the church that people need, then we, just like these apostles, need to be the same people, in the same place, doing the same thing, preaching the same message.

These apostles that we've read of, continued to do what God had commanded them to do. In spite of all the warnings, opposition, threatening, beatings, and inconveniences, they just kept on doing what God would have them to do. They were consistent. I believe it got to the point where even the Sanhedrin began to realize “We can't stop these people. There's nothing we can do. They're going to continue to preach this name of Jesus.” If any of the Lord's churches that have been around a few years, were to consider their church history, they would find that through the years, there were some people who continued in the same place, doing the same thing over and over again. Listening to and preaching the same message no matter what. That's how you continue to be the church that people need.

Consider some characteristics of these apostles who would not be moved from doing things God's way. There are many things that we can gather from these individuals, but we just want to consider the most obvious. They, no doubt, were a people of conviction. What they believed was more than an opinion or a preference to them, it was all more than just some conceived idea that they had. What they had was a deep seated belief that what they knew was the absolute truth, and was what every man and woman, boy and girl needed. Therefore they could not be silenced, because in their hearts and minds they knew that what they believed was true. It was a conviction. It was something that had a firm grip upon their hearts. These were men who did not just

merely have a firm grip on the truth. I want you to know that the truth had a firm grip on them. It had a firm grip upon their hearts, their minds, and upon their lives. They had a conviction. In other words, they had something that was worth living for, suffering for, dying for. That's why, every day, they were the same people, in the same place, doing the same thing, preaching the same message. They were consistent. That's what we need today. We need that consistency. What you and I say we believe, is it not worth living for, suffering for, and dying for? That's a conviction.

A lot of people will say, "Oh I would die for such and such." But, the problem is they're not willing to live. We must be willing to live, suffer, and die for the truth. The truth must have a firm grip upon us, upon our lives. This was the case with the apostles. Therefore, no matter what happened, no matter what changes took place all around them, no matter what others thought, no matter what others practiced, no matter what the authorities said, none of that mattered. They continued to be the same people, in the same place, doing the same things, preaching the same message. There was consistency. After a while anybody who watched these men, knew what they were going to do, because they were consistent. The lost world, that knows anything about us, may say, "I don't agree with them, but I guarantee you on Sundays and Wednesdays, there they are, the same people, in the same place, doing the same thing, preaching the same message." That's consistency.

They were also a people of great love. No doubt they loved their country, their homes, their families, and their friends. But, they loved the Lord and they loved the truth more than any of those things. In Acts 4:20, "*For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.*" Acts 5:29, "*We ought to obey God rather than men.*" You see those two verses declare this truth, that the Lord was a priority in their life. Doing God's business was the number one priority in their life. They were willing to risk

everything to be in the will of the Lord. A church must be willing to risk everything just to be in the will of the Lord.

They also were a people who were not governed by the world's principles or the world's standards, but by God's precepts, by God's command. They did not allow the secular world, nor the religious world to determine what they believed and practiced. They refused to be controlled by the secular and the religions world and to buckle under their circumstances. No matter what direction the world took, they continued to be the same people, in the same place, doing the same thing, preaching the same message. They were simply governed by what God had told them to do.

We see also that they were a people to whom God and the truth was very real. This wasn't something that they could just take or leave. God, truth, and the blessings of salvation were real to them. Therefore no matter what happened, they just continued doing the same thing, day in and day out. As a result of all of this, they were a people that were consistent. They were not on again off again, hot one day and cold the next, up one day down the next. They were just doing the same thing every single day. Daily they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ.

They did not sit back and wait see what anybody else was going to do. It didn't matter to them, because they knew what God had told them to do. They didn't sit back and wait to see what anybody else believed. They didn't take an opinion pole. They didn't see which way the wind was blowing. They simply did what God told them to do. There is something drastically wrong with any church that takes a pole or survey, and to see what people want. We're not here to give people what they want, we're here to give people what they need and what they need is the truth. "Well they don't like the truth." That doesn't change the fact that it is what they need. We're not here to tickle the worlds ears, to please the world. We're here to please God. We're here to do God's business God's way.

MAINTAINING BEING CONSISTENT

These individuals they were firm. They were steadfast, resolute, determined, very decided, adamant, unwavering, unbending, and committed to the Lord. All of those things are considered awful today by the religious world. God expects us to be firm, steadfast, resolute, determined, decided, adamant, and unwavering in the things of God. But, as far as the world is concerned, they think you're out of touch and uncaring.

We see that threats, inconveniences, and persecutions could not move them. In the Acts 20:22, Paul is talking to the Ephesian elders and he tells them his plan, he says, *“And now, behold, I go bound in the spirit unto Jerusalem,”* that is I have to do this God's leading me to do this, *“not knowing the things that shall befall me there: Save that the Holy Ghost witnesseth in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions abide me.”* He's saying, “I don't know exactly what's going to happen when I get to Jerusalem but I do know this, that there will be imprisonments and afflictions for me.” Then he says in verse 24, *“But none of these things”,* that is bonds and afflictions, *“move me”,* these things do not deter me, *“neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God.”*

We see these apostles could not be moved, we see that Paul was not moved. Which leads us to ask the question of ourselves, “What does it take to move us from the things of God? What does it take to deter us from the things of God?” We need to be a people that will not be moved, that will not be moved but will remain firm. We need to be a people that will not give in to the world. I promise you, the world is not interested in you giving in in just one area. You give in one area, they're going to want two and three and four. Where does it stop? It doesn't stop. Look at individuals lives. Look at some churches. It does not stop. Therefore, we simply must not give in to the world's ways.

We must not adapt to the worlds ways. We must simply cleave to the Lord.

In Joshua 23:7-8, God's people have always been called upon to be steadfast. *“That ye come not among these nations”*, you do not give in to them, you do not adapt to their ways, *“these that remain among you; neither make mention of the name of their gods, nor cause to swear by them, neither serve them, nor bow yourselves unto them: But cleave unto the LORD your God, as ye have done unto this day.”* Cleave, hold on to the Lord your God. 1st Thessalonians 5:21, *“Prove all things”*, that is, examine all things, examine what is preached, and if you find it to be true, *“hold fast”*, hold firmly, get a grip, do not let go, of, *“that which is good.”* No matter what happens, no matter how many threats there are, no matter how many deaths there might be, you hold on to the truth. That's consistency.

2nd Thessalonians 2:15, *“Therefore, brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word,”* that is, whether by the spoken word, *“or our epistle.”*, or our writings. Revelation 3:11, *“Behold, I come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown.”* What ever truth you have, hold it firmly. You do not let go. Paul told the Corinthians, in 1st Corinthians 15:58, *“be ye steadfast”*, that is be relentless, unchanging, unwavering, uncompromising. *“be ye steadfast, unmovable”*, that means that you are not effected by opposition, you are not effected by obstacles.

Peter and John were beaten and let go, and they went out and did the very thing they were beaten for. They were unmovable. They were not affected by the threats, by the opposition. I'm afraid today that many are scared to death of what the government might do. Does it really matter? I mean is it going to change anything? I realize it could change our lives, but does it change our mission? Not one iota. It does not change doing God's business. People say, *“Well you know in years to come we might not be able to do this.”* What are you saying? Are you saying that if there is a

threat you're going to stop? Or are we going to be the same people, in the same place, doing the same thing, preaching the same message? What if they do come and say, "You're no longer allowed to meet." Will we be, the very next Sunday, the same people, in the same place, doing the same thing, preaching the same message? That's consistency. This church at Jerusalem had that consistency.

In Galatians 5:1, Paul said to the churches of Galatia "*stand*". That is be situated, remain, "*Stand fast*", that is, stand firm, constant, and unswerving. To the Philippians he said, "*stand fast in one spirit with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel.*" The word of God lays down, in no uncertain terms, the mission of His churches. We know what our individuals obligations are and we know our church obligations are collectively. If we're going to continue to be the church that people need, no matter what happens, no matter the circumstances, no matter what others are doing, we have to be like these apostles, just doing the same thing over and over and over again.

You think about those who've gone away. Some have been gone 5 years, some 10, some 20. What if they came back after 5 years, after 10 years, after 20 years? Will they still hear the same thing? They ought to. They ought to expect that. You know every time there's a new pastor, some who have gone away, they'll show up. You know why? Because they want to see if things are going to be different. "Maybe this guy won't preach such and such. Maybe this guy will do it a little differently. Maybe I'll like him." They usually last a week or two, and they find out it's the same people, in the same place, doing the same thing, preaching the same message. Amen. That's exactly what it ought to be.

When people go away and they come back 10 years from now, they ought to say, "You know that's the same church it was 10 years ago when I left. Some of the people have gotten older, some may have passed on, some new ones may have come in, but they're still doing the same thing, preaching the same message, singing the same songs, doing

the Lord's business.” They may go away angry. We ought to thank God that there are places, those of the Lord's churches that you'll be able to go to, if the Lord doesn't come in 20 years, and they'll still be doing the same things, still preaching the same message.

For the sake of this church, future generations, the truth, and the Lord's glory, we must continue to do the same things, preaching the same message. When these little ones grow up 20 years from now, they'll find out, “You know, it's the same church that I grew up in. They haven't changed. They're still preaching the same message.” They may not like it. We pray that they will. But it will be able to be said, “Those people do the same things every Sunday.” Amen.

I want to do the same things every Sunday morning, Sunday night, Wednesday night, and any other time that we meet. I don't want people to come in here wondering, “Well, I wonder what they're going to do this week?” They know there is going to be singing of the old songs, scriptural songs, and preaching from God's word. If they don't like that, there's plenty of other places that they can go that will meet their wants. They don't need to stay here and try to change us.

Chapter 8

A Proper Love For The Lord

“... thou hast left thy first love.”

– Revelation 2:4

We began this series by saying that there must be a maintaining of a proper perspective, a proper focus, a proper objective, of doing everything for the honor and glory of God. There must be a God added membership and a God called pastorate. As long as these first things are in place then there won't be any problem, with a God added membership, a God called pastorate. There must be a maintaining of distinction. The Lord has made his churches different, with distinction, never becoming the world. We must also maintain consistency, being steadfast and unwavering in the things of the Lord.

A proper love for the Lord is the motivation, the stimulus to do these things. If we're going to be the church that people need there must be a maintaining a first love. That brings us to Revelation 2:1-4. This is part of Christ's letter to the church at Ephesus. The church at Ephesus had been in existence for about 40 years when they received this letter from the Lord. In verse 1, it says, "*Unto the angel*", or the messenger or the pastor, "*of the church of Ephesus write; These things saith he that holdeth the seven stars in his right hand, who walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks; I know thy works, and thy labour, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them which are evil: and thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars: And hast borne, and hast patience, and for my name's sake hast laboured, and hast not fainted.*" Then the whole tone of the letter changes in verse 4. "*Nevertheless*". When someone begins to commend you as Christ has done in verses 2 and 3, and then all of a sudden they say, "But", or "Nevertheless", brace yourself, the whole tone has now changed. "*Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love.*"

The letter begins with a commendation there in verses 2 as 3. He spoke of their labor, their endurance. That's what He means by the word "*patience*" in verse 2. He spoke of their intense adherence to the truth, that is, "*thou canst not bear them which are evil*". He spoke of their ability to

discern between truth and error, between right and wrong. He says, *“thou hast tried them which say they are apostles”*. People can say anything and a church has the right to try them. They have a right to prove them. The Lord is commending them for doing that, and *“hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars”*, that is, through this process of trial, *“thou hast found them to be liars.”* He spoke of their loyalty in verse 3. In verse 6, He spoke of their hatred for error, *“But this thou hast, that thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.”*

So, after approximately 40 years since their beginning, they're still walking in the truth, the gospel is still being preached from their pulpit, they are still putting a difference between truth and error, between right and wrong. They are still striving for the cause of Christ, laboring steadily in the work of the Lord. But, they were in danger because of a deficiency. Something had happened. He said in verse 4, *“Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love.”* The Lord is telling them that even though all these other things are in place, something is wrong. Something is missing. There is a glaring deficiency and this placed them in great danger. Despite all the outward appearances, when the Lord says, *“Nevertheless”*, He says, *“Despite all the outward appearances, that does not change this deficiency. That does not change what I have against you.”* He is saying, *“These things that I have mentioned can not make up for this one deficiency, this one thing that I have against you.”*

This one thing was so serious that it endangered their very existence. Verse 5, says, *“Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent.”* Outwardly, everything appeared fine, but something was wrong and endangered their very existence. If your existence as a church is in danger, then you, of course, are well on your

way to ceasing to be the church that people need. This church was in danger of ceasing to be that church.

I want you to notice in Revelation 2:4, that they had done something to cause the deficiency and danger. It wasn't something that just happened. Verse 4 says, "... *thou hast ...*". They did something. There was something wrong, something missing and it was due to something that they had done. There was a deficiency that caused a conflict between them and God. "*Nevertheless, I have somewhat against thee.*" That's a conflict between this church and God due to something they had done. If there is ever a conflict between God and a church, between God and an individual, it's because of something we have done, not something God has done. They were in danger of ceasing to be a church, in danger of having the "candlestick" removed, and it was all due to something that they had done. They could not blame any other church, they could not blame any other individual. This was something that they had done, this was something that they allowed to happen.

Then he says, "*thou hast left*". To leave is to part, to move away. "Thou hast left", that is, thou hast parted from, thou hast moved away, thou hast turned away, thou hast abandoned. Christ states this as a fact. That's a charge, an indictment, against the church of Ephesus. They left something that was absolutely essential. "*Thou hast left thy first love.*" He does not say that they had ceased to love Him. He says, "*Thou hast left thy first love.*" He looks at these people whom He loves, and He simply tells them, "Though you have labored much, though you have endured much, and though you are still standing for the truth, and though there are still a distinction about you, you simply do not love me the same way that you used to." This was a deficiency, and it put them in great danger of ceasing to be.

First love, I believe, speaks of a kind of love. It's not that they had ceased to love Christ. Though this first love is to grow and intensify, there are certain characteristics about first love that we can not afford to lose. This first love, of

course, is the love that we had for Him when we first came to know Him. That love the church of Ephesus should have increased by this time.

I want to consider the characteristics of that first love. It was fervent. *"Thou hast left thy first love"*, meaning their love was no longer fervent. They still had a love, but it wasn't fervent. It wasn't intense. Did they love the truth? Yes. They stood for the truth. But, you know, a danger is that we can love the truth more than we love the Lord. That puts us in great danger. That puts us in tremendous danger. That first love is a love that flames forth, it boils over, it is a fervent love. It's a feeling, an emotion that is beyond description. They had lost that. They had left that. They no longer had that feeling. They no longer had that emotion that was beyond description.

With first love, you do everything without reservation. No questions asked. But, they had left their first love. There were now reservations. That first love is inhibited. This love they had was inhibited. That first love, of course, is personal. It's very very real. But, they had left that. It was a love that filled them with excitement. It was a love that filled them with enthusiasm. When people fall in love, there's an excitement, there's an enthusiasm. You look at a married couple, and many times though they still love one another, the excitement is gone, the enthusiasm is gone, that first love is gone. That's what happened to this church. It wasn't the same. This endangered them, just like in your marriage. If first love is not there, whether you know it or not, your marriage is in danger. If first love isn't in a church, the church is in danger. We must have this characteristic of this first love if we are going to continue to be the church that people need.

This first love has a strong drawing effect upon our hearts. It moves our hearts, it thrills our soul, it controls us. You look at someone who just falls in love and they're the absolute control of that feeling and that emotion of love. The church at Ephesus lost that. They left that.

A PROPER LOVE FOR THE LORD

This first love makes us ready to do anything. It fills us with a passion. It becomes the yearning of our life. It is a love that causes us to choose the one we love over everything else. When two people first fall in love, one of the mistakes they often make is they forsake their friends. Why? Because they're too wrapped up in one another. But, that's first love. First love is willing to choose the one who is loved over everything else.

First love becomes a pursuit of your life. You're willing to move anywhere, go anywhere, do anything for first love. First love makes the one who is loved a priority. It makes that one who is loved the very purpose and the very object of your life. I believe when the Lord says, "you have left your first love", He is saying these characteristics are no longer there.

When you have a first love, there's nothing more important than that one that you love. You have eyes for no one else but that one you love. When we talk about our first love for the Lord, that simply means that nothing else is more important than the Lord. We have eyes for no one else but the Lord. It was a love that made us sensitive to Him. You know what it means if we become insensitive to the Lord's leading, and the Lord's word, and the Lord's message? It means that we've left our first love. First love made us sensitive to whatever God said, to however God led. First love will also cause you to grieve over sin. First love will vex your soul. That is, it will cause unrighteousness to vex your soul.

It was first love that made God's word so special, made His day such a delight, made the house of God so special. If these things are not special, it's because you've left your first love. Just like the church of Ephesus, you can go through the motions, but the love, the excitement, the enthusiasm, the passion, the fervency, all of those things are gone.

It was that first love that made the preaching of God's word so interesting to us. I've watched through the years, the

Lord saves someone and they're excited to hear the preaching of God's word. They can't wait. They'll sit on the end of the pew, they'll sit up toward the front. Give them some time, they'll move back, move a little further back. Now they're not sitting on the edge of the pew trying to catch every word, they're leaning back half asleep. That first love is dying. It's first love that made worship so special. It was first love that caused us to always want to dig deeper, to always want to walk a little further for the Lord, to climb a little higher, and to draw a little closer to the Lord. It was that first love that caused us to want to live for Him. We were attracted to Him. That's first love. You can hold to the truth and not be attracted to Christ. You can be more attracted to truth than you are to Jesus Christ. That, of course, places a church in great danger. It is first love that caused us to long for the Lord, that caused us to respect Him, that caused us to see His dignity.

It was first love that caused us to stay focused upon Him. A couple first falls in love, they lose focus on a lot of things. Their focus is on each other. That's how it is with the Lord. The reason we become so focused on other things is because we cease to be focused upon the Lord. It is a leaving of first love. It was first love that caused us to want to spend time with the Lord, to want to talk to Him, to want to listen to Him. It was that first love that could not stand the thought of being away from Him, of living without Him. It was that first love that caused us to realize that we couldn't be too holy, too consecrated, that we could not love Him enough, go far enough for Him, or do enough for Him.

This church continued to do the same things, but it wasn't the same. It wasn't the same as it once was. We have heard many say, through the years, "It's just not the same as it once was." You're right. You know why? Because people have left their first love. They have many other lovers. They continued to go through the motions, but the emotions of love, the feelings of love were gone. The Lord said, "You need to repent of this and if you don't, I'm going to remove

the candlestick.” If we're going to continue to be the church that people need, we need to guard this love for the Lord.

As a pastor, it's very easy, but also great danger, to study just for the sake of preparing a message, just for the sake of teaching a lesson. It's very easy to lose sight of who it's all about, the Lord. That is, it's very easy to leave first love.

How do we keep that love alive? First of all, we need to be aware of the thieves. The thieves of communication. You listen to most wives and their number one complaint is a lack of communication. While men and women have different ideas of communication, communication has to be kept alive. There are the thieves of communication with the Lord. There are the thieves of time with the Lord. If you do not communicate and you do not spend time with your spouse, first love dies, it disappears. I'm not saying that you don't love, but the first love, the characteristics die. That's also true with our relationship with the Lord.

Most marriages would have never taken place if people were as careless about their time together before marriage as they are after marriage. A marriage wouldn't have lasted, they wouldn't have lasted. The marriage wouldn't have taken place. This is the failure of us individually, this is also a failure of a church. We fail to spend time with the Lord. Oh we study the truth, we stand for the truth, there is a distinction, we are different, but how much communication and how much time is spent with the Lord? If there is a breakdown in communications, if there is a breakdown in time spent with the Lord, we are in danger. We are in danger of ceasing to be.

The failure to keep this first love is due to neglect. All you have to do is neglect it and it will die. It is also due to other interests. First love is only interested in one thing, the object of that love. First love in the Lord was only interested in one thing, the Lord. But other interests come in and that robs communication and time. Then there begins to be a decrease of appreciation. Listen to most wives, and

what do they say? “He doesn't appreciate me.” There is a decrease of appreciation, when first love begins to die.

This first love needs guarding because the more we love Him, the easier it is to commit to the Lord. Commitment is not a problem when there is love. Commitment is only a problem when there's selfishness. Commitment to the Lord is not a problem when we love the Lord. The more we love Him, the more surrendered we will be to Him. The problem is not a lack of surrender, the real problem is a lack of love for the Lord. If you love the Lord, you will surrender to Him. It all comes back to this failure to keep ourselves in the love of God.

The more we love Him the more willing we are to follow, obey, and put Him first. Where there is love, there is no problem putting Him first. We have to keep this love because the more we love Him the nearer I want to be with Him. If someone that loves you tells you they love you, but they do not want to spend any time with you, you have every reason to be suspicious of what they said. When a person says, “I love the Lord.”, but they don't want to spend any time with the Lord, what does that mean? They don't love the Lord. The more you love the Lord, the nearer you want to be to Him. In order for you and in order for us to be the church that people need, we need to be a people that is close to God. We need to be a people that is near to God. That's what the world needs. It needs a people that are close to God, a people that are in communications with God, a people that spends time with God. Then we'll be the church that people need.

That requires a love for the Lord. The more that we love Him, the more that we'll love His word, His day, His law, His people, and Him. The more that we love Him, the more that we'll love the lost world, and have a compassion for them, and have a desire to see them come to His saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. People need us to be in love with the Lord. The world does not need Home Baptist Church to be in love with the world. The world needs us to be in love

with the Lord. That's what they need. This must be kept in place if we're going to continue to be the church that people need. The more we love the Lord, the more we want to be in the center of His will. We can not be the church that people need if we are not in the center of God's will if we're not doing what God says. The more that we love Him, the more we want to be in the center of God's will. It's not love that rebels against the will of God. It's not love that kicks against the instruction of God. Love freely surrenders to these things.

The more we love the Lord, the more we desire to be linked with Him. The more we desire to be linked with Him the less we are linked with the world. The more we love the Lord, the more we desire to be bound with Him, and intertwined, and weaved with Him. The world today does not need Home Baptist Church to be linked with the world. The world today needs Home Baptist Church to be linked with the Lord. That's why this love must continue if we're going to continue to be the church that people need.

The more that we love the Lord, the more we want Him to have everything. The more willing we are to give up our stature, our rank, our importance, our honors, our self reliance, our plans, and our ways. The world does not need for you and I to be a people who refuses to let go of our own ways. The world needs us to be a people who are willing to surrender to God's ways. That takes love for the Lord. The more we love the Lord the more willing we are to stoop and forget about self and to think nothing of it.

The more we love the Lord, the more we simply wish that we just had more to give. We simply wish we had more time to give, we had more of ourselves to give to the Lord. It's not love that holds back from the Lord. First love does not do that.

The more that we love the Lord the more He becomes a priority to us. People struggle with priorities. The reason they struggle with priorities goes back to love. It all goes back to love. *"Thou hast left thy first love."* The more we

love the Lord, the more meaningful our lives become. The more we love the Lord, the more He controls and dominates what we do, the more He is in the center of our interests, and the more we seek Him. The world doesn't need us to be seeking the things of the world. The world needs us to be seeking the things of the Lord. This goes back to first love. If He is first love, then He becomes our law, He becomes our pattern. Oh we desperately need to stay in love with the Lord.

You go into a restaurant, and look around at the couples that are sitting at tables, and you can almost tell by watching them how long they have been married. That's true. If they just met, they're talking non stop. If they've been married for some time, they're not saying a word. That happens. It happens with the Lord also, it happens on that spiritual realm. We're not saying that you fall out of love with a person or that you don't love the Lord. But, there are certain characteristics about first love and that's what keeps it going.

The more that we love the Lord, the more enabled we are to endure. You can endure just about anything for love. If you love somebody you can endure. The other night I walked through Jo Ann Fabrics. Now you want to talk about endurance. That's love. But, you know I thought about that, when we were dating, it didn't bother me to walk through Jo Ann Fabrics. Now I say, you go there, I'm going over here. First love. We must not let it escape, we must not leave first love.

The more we love the Lord, the better outlook and attitude we have on life, also. A lot of the Lord's people have a terrible outlook and a terrible attitude. It all goes back to a lack of this first love. The more that we love the Lord is what makes service a joy. This church of Ephesus, they continued to serve the Lord, but they weren't happy, they weren't enthused, they weren't excited. What brings the happiness of serving and laboring is you do it out of love.

A PROPER LOVE FOR THE LORD

When you serve the Lord out of love, His commandments are not grievous. It concerns me when people are always talking about how hard it is to serve the Lord, how difficult it is. If you love the Lord, His commandments are not grievous. Where there's love, the difficulty disappears. You're willing to get through the difficulty. If we're going to continue to be the church that people need, we must love the Lord.

We must love the Lord. We must have this first love, these characteristics of first love. Then truth takes on an entirely different meaning. As I get older, I can truthfully say, this world means less and less and less all the time. For the most part, (there are always exceptions), the world is everything. As you get older and you've experienced some things, you've learned some things, and you start to learn what's important. You can even talk to lost people, and when they're dying, they have a whole different perspective on what matters. I've never stood by the bedside of one who is dying and they were worried about what they were missing on television. It's never happened and I don't expect it ever to happen. You know what? It doesn't matter what is on television. It doesn't even matter what their favorite sports team is doing. It doesn't matter any more. Priorities begin to get in order. You know what becomes very important on death beds? Family. It becomes very important. "Oh I wish ... ", I've never heard anybody say, "Oh I sure wish I'd have spent more time fishing. I sure wish I'd have spent more time playing ball." I have heard them say, "I wish I'd have spent more time with my kids, I wish I'd have spent more time with my wife", or, "my husband."

First love. Don't leave it. If you do, it will fill your life with regrets. As a church, it will give us many regrets if we leave this first love. We've got to fall in love with the Lord, and we've got to stay in love with the Lord.

Chapter 9

Maintaining Evangelism

“ ... they ... went every where
preaching the word.” – Acts 8:4

In Acts 8:1, the BIBLE says, *“And Saul was consenting unto his death. And at that time,”* that is following the murder of Stephen, *“there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they,”* that is the church which that was at Jerusalem, *“were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judaea and Samaria, except the apostles.”* The apostles remained in Jerusalem. Acts 8:4 says, *“Therefore they that were scattered abroad,”* those we just read about in verse one, *“went every where preaching the word.”* These verses record a specific activity of the Jerusalem church during the time that would certainly be considered as unfavorable circumstances or hindering circumstances.

It was a time of fierce persecution and because of the persecution, these members of the Jerusalem church were driven from their homes, were in danger of losing their lives, and they were scattered abroad everywhere. We read that they faithfully declared the word of God everywhere they went. While the Jerusalem church was scattered abroad preaching the word of God, the apostles remained in Jerusalem, I believe doing the same thing that the others were doing, which was preaching the word of God. What we have here is an example, a pattern for church evangelism, which I believe is one of the essentials of being the church that people need. This message will be on the subject of a “Maintaining of Evangelism”. If a church is going to be the church people need there must be a maintaining of evangelism.

First of all, when I speak of the church I'm speaking of the Lord's church, the kind that He established during His earthly ministry. The church has what the world needs. Home Baptist Church has what the world needs. The government does not have what the world and society needs. The church of the Lord Jesus Christ is referred to as the pillar and ground of truth, and as such, she has what the world needs. The world needs the truth and the church possesses the truth.

You and I all know the world is a mixed up place. It is a place filled with the vile, the wicked, people who have been duped, and are perusing after and clinging to that which will not work, which will bring them further into despair. They cling to and they pursue these things. The churches of the Lord Jesus Christ have the solution, the remedy for that which is futile, useless, hollow, empty, and hopeless. We have what the world so desperately needs.

Being in possession of what the world needs does not mean that we are being the church that people need. There's more to it than just having what the world needs. Yes, we have what the world needs, but in order to be the church that they need, we need to share what we have. We need to share the truth we have with them. We need to convey the message to them. We need to communicate and express what they need. I don't believe any church can be what people need unless they are sharing the message, unless they are conveying the message, unless they are communicating and expressing that message to the world. They can not be the church that people need. If we fail to share the message, if we fail to communicate the truth, if we neglect to do this, then we fail to be what people need.

The members of the Jerusalem church here in Acts 8:4, went everywhere preaching the word. The church has been placed in the world with a commission, with a responsibility. Before Christ left this earth, He very plainly charged His church concerning what they were to be doing. On that Passover night, prior to the crucifixion, Jesus said to His church that night, in John 15:26. Jesus is meeting with the apostles, God set the apostles first in the church, this was the church and God The Son, Jesus Christ, is speaking to the church. He says, "*But when the Comforter is come,*" speaking of the Holy Spirit, "*whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father; he shall,*" the spirit, "*testify of me.*" But then notice what it says in verse 27, "*And ye also shall bear witness,*" or ye also should testify, "*because ye have been*

with me from the beginning.” The spirit of God would testify to them Jesus Christ and they too were to testify or to bear witness of Jesus Christ. That means they were to show forth, to demonstrate Jesus Christ. This is what the church was supposed to do.

Following the crucifixion and the resurrection, you remember that Christ called for a meeting with His church. He told them that He would meet them on a particular mountain in Galilee. When He met them there, He again commissioned them. He said in Matthew 28:19, *“Go ye therefore, and teach, ...”* When you teach you show, you instruct, explain, and even more importantly, demonstrate. *“Go ye therefore, and teach all nations ...”* Mark puts it this way in Mark 16:15, *“Go ye into all the world, ...”* There wasn't any place that was exempt. He said, *“Go ye into all the world, and preach,”* that is, proclaim and deliver, *“the gospel ...”* A particular message was given to the church to preach. They were not to preach politics or current events. They were to preach the gospel, because this is what the world needs. The world doesn't need to hear about politics from the Lord's church, because there's a far more important message. They need to hear the gospel.

He says, *“You go into all the world, you preach the gospel, and do so to every creature.”* There is no individual that is to be exempt from the message. Luke 24:47 is a little more specific concerning the message that was to be delivered. He said, *“And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.”* You have to begin somewhere and Jesus said I want you to begin where you're located, in Jerusalem. That's always the beginning. You don't begin in Australia, you begin where you are. Then in Acts 1:8, just prior to Christ's ascension, He said to His church, *“... ye shall be witnesses unto me ...”* A witness is someone who testifies on behalf of another. That's what the church is to do. A witness tells what they know. A witness tells what they've seen, what they've heard, what they've experienced. Jesus

said ye shall be my witnesses. That is, I want you to tell what you know, what you've seen, what you've heard, what you have experienced.

Continuing in Acts 1:8, He said, "... *both in Jerusalem, ...*" that would be the city that they were located in, "... *and in all Judaea, ...*" that would be the state, "... *and in Sumeria, ...*" would be the country, "... *and unto the uttermost parts of the earth.*" There's an order. This is the mission, the assignment, the duty of the Lord's churches, to testify, to bear witness of Jesus Christ. Now knowing the mission, the assignment, the duty, we are now able to see the purpose and the function of the church. They are to testify, they are to bear witness. Can a church possibly be what people need if they do not fulfill their very purpose and function. We must fulfill our purpose, we must fulfill our function. It's not the purpose of the church to build a gymnasium. That's not the purpose. The purpose of the church is to bear witness. "Well, we've got to build the gymnasium so we can do that." No you don't. Don't be ridiculous. Our purpose is to bear witness, to testify what we know, what we've seen, what we've heard, what we have experienced.

From these passages that we've made reference to, regarding the mission of the Lord's church, it is a world wide mission in it's extent. Also, there is a proper order in which it is to be carried out. We're specifically told that in Mark 16:15. "... *Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.*" We see that the mission of the church has no barriers, such as race. We're to bear witness. It doesn't matter what color they are, it doesn't matter what language they speak, we are to bear witness. Gender is no barrier. We are to bear witness to every creature, male and female. Language is no barrier. Culture is no barrier. You see it's not the mission of the church to go into a foreign country and change their lifestyle. That's not the mission of the church. It's not the mission of the church to Americanize the world. That's not our mission. Our mission is to testify and to

witness. Education is no barrier. We are to bear witness to the educated, the uneducated. It doesn't matter. Social status, social standing is no barrier.

We see also from these passages that the mission involves a particular message. It is not a vague or uncertain message. It is a very explicit, unmistakable, distinct message. It is the message of the gospel. It is the message of repentance and remission of sins. It is the message of the word of God. Notice again in Acts 8:4, “... *they ... went everywhere preaching the word.*” In verse 5, “*Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ ...*” Jesus Christ is who we are to bear witness of, to be testifying of. In verse 12, “... *when they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, ...*” It is a message of the gospel, of the word, of Christ, of the kingdom of God. This is a very clear and unmistakable message. We must always keep the message clear because this is what the world needs. This is what people need.

This is a message that is indirect opposition, direct conflict with the thinking and lifestyle of the world. It is a message about the only way out of the pit of corruption. All around us people are in the pit of corruption. It is a message about the only way out of the enslavement, the binding, and holding power of sin. It is a message about the only way out of darkness, ignorance, and blindness that sin causes. This is what the world needs to hear. This is what your neighbor needs to hear. This is what the person working next to you needs to hear. This is what people need today. If we're going to be the church that people need, then we must be conveying that message.

It's a message about the only way out of the filth and the depths of sin. Every single one of us, almost every day, see people see in the filth and depths of sin. It can disgust and we abhor what we see. We must never lose sight that we have the message that they need to hear. It is a message about the only way out of the devastation and the condemnation of sin, out of a life of emptiness, endless

wandering, and a life built upon sand. It is a message that people need to hear. It is a message about liberty, light, pardon, and sins being cleansed. It is a message about how a person can be made nigh to God and find reconciliation with God. It's a message of joy and peace. It is a message concerning a fountain that can not be drawn dry, of a solid rock in the midst of shifting sand. It is a message about one that is greater than all. This is the message that we have. This is the message that people need.

We know! We know the way out for a person who is trapped in the filth and the depths of sin. We have a responsibility to convey that message. If we keep that message within the walls of this building, we are not being the church that people need. The message that the church is to carry to the world is not a message of philosophy or politics. It is a message of Christ and it is to be preached everywhere and to everyone.

We have here the example of this Jerusalem church going everywhere preaching the word. We, Home Baptist Church and all of the Lord's churches have a commission. This commission rests upon us collectively as well as individually. How is the mission, the assignment, the duty of evangelism, best carried out? When is a church truly evangelistic? I've heard preachers say, "Well, if you don't have door to door visitation, then you're not evangelistic." That is quite a statement. While that just goes through me, it does raise the question, "When is a church evangelistic?" Does sending money to foreign missionaries make us evangelistic? No That can be a part of it, but that in and of itself does not make a church missionary or evangelistic. "What if we did this? What if we preach the gospel from the pulpit." We ought to. But that's not going to reach very many people. You have maybe a few visitors every week and you can preach the gospel from the pulpit. The truth is, that limits you to a great extent. We're not saying there's anything wrong with preaching the gospel from the pulpit. That's not what we're saying at all. The truth is, door to door

visitation, supporting missionaries, preaching the gospel from the pulpit; nothing compares to the outreach of every individual member. Nothing compares and nothing is more far reaching than every individual member of Home Baptist Church, in their everyday circumstances, among their acquaintances, declaring the word of God. That's evangelism. I don't believe that a church is evangelistic unless its members are out there everyday telling the world about Jesus Christ. This is what that first church did. You think about our membership. We're all put in various places. You live somewhere I don't live. You have neighbors that I don't have. We're all put in various places. Why are we put there? Why don't we all just live in the same place? Because God has ordained it this way. He has put us in various places to do what? To testify. As a member of Home Baptist Church you have a responsibility to testify in the place that God has put you. I'm talking about the place you live. That covers a lot of places. We have a lot of places represented here tonight.

Also, God has placed us in various positions. He's placed us in various jobs, various schools, etc. We have a responsibility to testify to tell what we know. To tell what we've experienced. To testify of Jesus Christ. God has put us in different families. I can witness to members of my family that you'll never meet. You can witness to members of your family that I'll never meet. Don't you see, if every single member would go everywhere preaching the gospel; meaning the place they live, the position they find themselves in, whether it be job or school, and the different families we are placed in, we are there to bear witness; when we are all doing that, we are being the church that people need.

We are also placed among various people. We know different people. We are to bear witness to these. When you start breaking this down, Home Baptist Church has a wide influence. Just considering the various places we live, the various families we've been placed in, the various places you

go to school, and the various places you work, if everybody is witnessing, that's a wide spread influence. They went everywhere preaching the word of God.

God places us in various circumstances, I believe to testify. We see many examples in the word of God. In Mark 1:45, we read of a leper who had been healed by Christ. He went and simply told what he experienced. "Well, I don't know that much about the BIBLE, I don't feel qualified." First of all, shame on you. That's not an excuse. Secondly, you tell what you've experienced. You tell what you know. When the Lord first saved me, I did not know anything about the scriptures, but I knew what I'd just experienced. That I knew. I could tell people what I experienced. In Mark 5, we read of the demonic of Gadara. Jesus sent him home to his family and he bore witness to his family. In John 1, one of the first apostles came to a knowledge of Christ. They went and told another and so on and so on. John 4:28-29, we read of a woman at the well. I believe the Lord saved her soul and she went into the city and told of a man by the name of Jesus. John 5, we have a man that had been impotent for 38 years. Jesus Christ healed him and he went to the Pharisees and he said it was Jesus that "made me whole". We have example after example of individuals testifying of Jesus Christ.

God puts people in our paths. God will put people in my path that he will not put in yours and visa versa. I believe these people are put in our path for a reason. We are to bear witness, we are to testify what we know. You have someone that God has placed in your path, that no one else in this church has in their path. You have an opportunity. I've heard people say, "Well, you know I've been praying about a chance to witness to that man or that woman but just haven't had the chance." "How long have you known them?" "Oh I've known them all my life." Don't tell me that! I don't buy it. Don't tell me that you haven't had a chance to tell them about the Lord. Just be honest. We've had innumerable

chances, but haven't taken them. We've had our chances to speak what we know.

The Lord gives us in a variety of ways, innumerable opportunities to bear witness. In Philippians 1, Paul is talking about his imprisonment. The church at Philippi was very disturbed that Paul was in prison and very disturbed at the thought that Paul was suffering. He's writing the church to comfort them, and he says in verse 12, *"But I would ye should understand, brethren, that the things which happened unto me have fallen out rather,"* or have resulted in, *"unto the furtherance of the gospel;"* In other words, "Yes, the Lord has seen fit that I be imprisoned. But, I would have you to understand that that has given me an opportunity to preach to prison guards that I would have never otherwise had the opportunity to do so."

We need to look at everything as an opportunity. Verse 13, *"So that my bonds in Christ are manifest in all the palace ..."* He's saying he would have never had the opportunity to preach the gospel in the palace. But being in prison and preaching to the prison guards, word has also gotten to the palace. God has given me opportunity. The gospel has been furthered. Verse 14, *"And many of the brethren in the Lord, waxing confident by my bonds, are much more bold to speak the word without fear."* Not only did he have opportunity to speak, but his circumstances had encouraged others and they also were speaking. This is evangelism.

We need to take the opportunities that God gives us. We need to view all the happenings of our life, whether they be things we would have chosen or whether they be things we would have never chosen, we need to view all the happenings of our life as opportunities to bear witness, to bear testimony of Jesus Christ. If you are in the hospital and you have a roommate, you have opportunity to bear witness to that person. You may be the only person at Home Baptist Church that ever sees that person. You have an opportunity. Every circumstance that God brings into our lives needs to be

viewed as an opportunity to manifest Jesus Christ. The people we meet, the people who cross our paths, need to be viewed as an opportunity for the furtherance of the gospel. We leave the results up to God.

We have a responsibility to testify because we have what they need. How many times God's people have listened to sad, sad, pitiful stories from people and don't say a word about Jesus Christ. What a shame. When the world is pouring out their problems, there's an opportunity to say, "I want to tell you something. I want to tell you what you need." "Well, they'll get mad." They might. "They'll never talk to me again." That may be so. But, you have what they need and we are responsible to share what they need.

We must be faithful to our mission, to our assignment, to our duty. I believe the most effective way of doing that is for each and every member to be a witness, to be a testimony of Jesus Christ. Tell people about the church. Tell people about what you've heard. Tell people about Jesus Christ. Don't be ashamed. When they start talking about their church, you've got an opportunity. Don't let that pass by. "Well, let me tell you about my church, the church I go to." This is how a church conveys the message that people need.

We can send money to foreign missionaries, but there's nothing that gets more done than just each member telling what they know to people they know. We can organize a door to door visitation program. I'm not criticizing that at all. But, I'm telling you nothing reaches more people than God's people every single day just telling what they know about Jesus Christ. You know people that no one else in the church knows, that are sick, that have deadly diseases, and you can say, "Can I pray with you? Can I show you something?" You say, "Well it's just not the time." What are you waiting for? They're dying. I've had people tell me, "Brother Dan, they're dying. Don't upset them." In other words, don't talk about Christ. WAKE UP!! They're dying and going to hell and you've got the audacity to say,

don't unset them? Don't tell them what they need to hear? This is our mission. It is best fulfilled when we're all actively telling what we know.

They went everywhere preaching the word. I believe their motivation was two fold. First, love to God. Our motivation is not to see how many people we can get saved. First of all, we can't save anybody. Our first motivation is, we love the Lord and we're doing this for His glory. Our second motivation is, we have a love and concern for the welfare of our fellow human beings. We have enough love for them and concern for them to tell them what they need. It's not enough to say, "Well, I'm praying for them." You have what they need. Tell them. Tell them what they need.

If we're going to be evangelistic, there must be a burden for the souls of men. There must be a care, there must be an interest, concerning their soul. Really, how can you and I talk to anybody and it does not cross our mind, "I wonder if they know the Lord." I mean if that thought doesn't cross our mind, something is terribly wrong with us. It always ought to be on our minds. "I wonder if they know the Lord." The best way to find out is to ask them. "Do you know the Lord? Can I tell you something about Christ?" Read Romans 9:1-2, Romans 10:1-3. You see the burden that Paul had for his countrymen, concerning their souls.

In Acts 17:15-16 we see Paul, *"And they that conducted Paul brought him unto Athens: and receiving a commandment unto Silas and Timotheus for to come to him with all speed, they departed. Now while Paul waited for them at Athens: ..."* I just picture Paul waiting, and he's watching. He's watching people. He's looking at the surroundings of Athens, and *"... his spirit was stirred in him, when he saw the city wholly given to idolatry."* His soul was stirred because of the sin that was going on, because he saw people that were ignorant, having no knowledge of Jesus Christ. Paul had what they needed. If we're going to be the church that people need, each and everyone of us need to be stirred about the souls of men, women, boys, and girls.

We're not talking about tricking people, we're not talking about playing games, we're talking about testifying. We're talking about bearing witness, telling what we know of Jesus Christ. How can we be the church that people need, when we have what they need, but we don't share it with them?

God has placed every single one of the members of Home Baptist Church in a particular place. God brings many people into our lives, brings many circumstances into our lives, and we have the opportunity to testify. That's being evangelistic. Not just one of two people, but the whole church, in their everyday life, in their everyday circumstances, bearing witness of Jesus Christ. God help us. We desire to be the church that people need. God help us not to keep that message that they so desperately need inside of us. God help us not to be silent.

You have to use some wisdom, there is a time to be silent. We're not to cast pearls before swine. That is, you don't give an opportunity, when someone is blaspheming, you just stop and go away. Use some wisdom. But don't be silent. We need to be telling what we know. Some people haven't even told their own families. What a shame. How sad. Don't even tell their own families. They expect the preacher to come and do that. No, you need to do that. You need to tell them. You need to tell them what they need to hear. "Well, I'm just trying to keep peace in the home." You need to quit being so selfish and tell them what they need to hear. They need Jesus Christ, and that's what you need to tell them about. I'm not saying you need to hammer, hammer, hammer, but, you do need to tell about Jesus Christ.

I can't tell you how many times I have tried to speak the message to my dad, through the years. He'll listen for a couple minutes and he'll say, "That's enough. I don't want to hear it any more." I'll stop, no need to go on. Take the opportunity. If the person is in a coma, you know they're lost, tell them about Christ. "Well, they can't hear me." You leave that to God. You tell them about the Lord. If anything else, it gives you good practice. You just tell them what they

need to hear. “Well, this isn't the time.” What are you waiting for? When is it the time? It is the time. You need to tell them. Tell their families, tell them about the Lord. We don't have to be ignorant about it, we don't have to be rude, but we are to tell them of the Lord.

Chapter 10

Maintaining Prayer

“... they lifted up their voice to God with one accord, ...” – Acts 4:24

To continue this series of messages, being the church that people need is not as easy as most people think. In Acts 4:23-33, it says *“And being let go,”* referring to Peter and John, *“they went to their own company, and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said unto them. And when they heard that, they lifted up their voice to God with one accord, and said, Lord, thou art God, which hast made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all that in them is: Who by the mouth of thy servant David hast said, Why did the heathen rage, and the people imagine vain things? The kings of the earth stood up, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord, and against his Christ. For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together, For to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done. And now, Lord, behold their threatenings: and grant unto thy servants, that with all boldness they may speak thy word, By stretching forth thine hand to heal; and that signs and wonders may be done by the name of thy holy child Jesus. And when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness.”*

By way of background to these verses, Acts 3:1-8 tell of the healing of the lame man who sat at the temple gate, which filled the people of Jerusalem with amazement and wonder. Many of them gathered at the temple. When Peter saw the people gather at the temple, he preached to them, as related in Acts 3:12-26.

The message that Peter preached grieved and angered the religious elite, and they arrested Peter and John, shown in the early verses of chapter 4. They held them until the next day and then they brought them before the Sanhedrin. We see that Peter proceeded to preach to the Sanhedrin in Acts 4:5-12. The Sanhedrin then commanded Peter and John to immediately stop preaching Jesus Christ and then let them go.

Being let go, as we read in our text, they went to their own company, which was the church and told the people that were assembled or congregated together what had happened as it says in Acts 4:23. The response of the church, upon hearing Peter and John had been threatened and that they must stop preaching Jesus Christ, was to band together in prayer. In verse 24, *“and when they had heard that, they lifted up their voice to God with one accord.”* They did not hire a lawyer, organize a rally to picket the council, or a protest march against religious discrimination. They did not throw up their hands in despair, becoming or downtrodden. They lifted up their voice to God. That sets an example, a pattern for the churches of the Lord. There is encouragement there for the churches of the Lord. If a church is ever going to continue to be the church that people need, they must be a praying church. They must maintain prayer. That's what we want to cover in this message, a maintaining of prayer.

Paul exhorted the church of Colossi in Colossians 4:2, saying, *“Continue in prayer; ...”*. That is, keep on praying, proceed on, persist on, in prayer, do not stop praying.

Notice the fact that the church of Jerusalem was a praying church, which sets an example and a pattern for you and I. Again, in Acts 4:24, *“And when they heard that, they lifted up their voice to God with one accord, ...”* They weren't singing, they were praying because verse 31 says, *“And when they had prayed, the place was shaken ...”* As soon as they heard that Peter and John had been threatened, the church had been threatened, because Peter and John were members of that church, they lifted up their voice to God. That was their impulse. That was not the last resort. Prayer should not be the last resort. Prayer should be what we do by impulse. When we hear something it ought be our impulse to pray. To many, I'm afraid, prayer is just the last resort. This wasn't the case. When they had heard the report of Peter and John, it was their instinct, it was their inclination to pray. When they heard the report of Peter and John, they did that

which was normal for them to do. They prayed. This was the normal thing for this church to do. They did that which they were accustomed to do, they did that which they had always done, they prayed. This is what they had done.

Acts 1:9-11 tells of the ascension of Christ back into heaven. Acts 2;1, you have the day of Pentecost. There are ten days between the ascension and the day Pentecost. So what was the church doing in that 10 day span? They were praying. Acts 1:12-13, after Christ is ascended, *“Then returned they unto Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is from Jerusalem a sabbath day’s journey. And when they were come in, they went up into an upper room, ...”* So there they are in the upper room and he mentions some of those that were present. Then in verse 14, *“These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brethren.”* When we read Acts 4:24, where they heard the report of Peter and John, they lifted up their voice to God. This is what they were accustomed to doing. They prayed.

Then we come to Acts 6:6 and the appointment of deacons. *“Whom they set before the apostles: and when they had prayed, they laid their hands on them.”* In Acts 12, Herod began to persecute the church. He killed James, he arrested Peter and intended on killing Peter the next day. But, the church gathered together in the house of Mary, not to discuss a plan of action, but to pray. In Acts 12:12, *“And when he had considered the thing, he came to the house of Mary the mother of John, whose surname was Mark; where many were gathered together praying.”* You see it was the habit of this church to turn their eyes from what man was doing, from their problems and circumstances and turn their eyes to God. That is what they were accustomed to do. That was their impulse. When they heard that something was wrong, the impulse was, “We’ve got to pray.” Whatever their circumstances were, their impulse and their instinct was, “We’ve got to pray.” Prayer was a priority to them, it was a way of life to them. They prayed.

The Lord's churches today have many advantages over the early church we read of in the book of Acts. Some of those advantages really might be disadvantages. We have more money. We certainly have more and nicer buildings. We definitely have more liberty, more Bibles, more resources, and more conveniences. Those are not the things that will make us the church that people need. Among all the things that we've mentioned up to this point, if we're going to be the church that people need, in spite of our resources, money, and liberty, we need to be a people of prayer. It needs to be natural, our impulse, our instinct to turn our eyes away from man and circumstances, and to turn our eyes to God and pray. That's the only way we can be the church that people need.

We live in the last days, in perilous times, and sin is rampant. It seems to me that churches ought to be praying more than they've ever prayed before. Yet, it seems like they pray less. We not only have to be a people of prayer, but that has to be our impulse, that has to be what we do. It's not our last resort, it is what we are inclined to do.

There must be a maintaining of a proper manner of prayer. Someone might ask or think, "Well what's so important about prayer?" It's a way that God has determined to communicate with Him. Prayer is also how He has chosen to hear His people. It is how we present our petitions to God. The Bible teaches in Hebrews 4:16, prayer is how we come to God, "*Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.*" Prayer is a way of approach to God.

Individual praying is very important of course, and every single member of the Lord's church has a responsibility to pray for one another every single day. If you don't do that, you're failing in your responsibility. It doesn't matter how much money you might give, how gifted you might be, those things do not make up for praying for one another and praying for the church. In this message, we're focusing on the church collectively praying. Notice

some things about this church's prayer, in Acts 4. They were unified in their praying. In verse 24, "*And when they,*" that's plural, "*lifted up their*", that's plural, "*voice*", that's singular. Many people praying, but it was one voice. There was unity in their praying. They were praying for the same thing. They had the same burden, the same concerns, and they lifted up their voice. It is added they did so with one accord. That is, there was agreement, there was harmony in their prayer.

In Acts 12:5, concerning the prayer meeting that went on in the house of Mary, that prayer was made of the church collectively. We also find there in verse 12, "*many were gathered together*". That is, jointly, in cooperation, in partnership, side by side, they joined together, doing what? *Praying*. They banded together in prayer. There was harmony, of felt need and they prayed. They were in harmony of feeling and desire and they were committed to praying. A church can not pray in harmony if they are not in harmony. The church must be in harmony, unity, agreement, so that they can pray together.

There ought to be special times when a church bands together, when a church commits, "We're going to pray." This church in the book of Acts had this. They were praying. No one was doing anything else. This is what they were doing. They were praying. They were not merely together, they were together praying. If we're going to be the church that people need, we must not only be a people of prayer, we must be a people that bands together to pray. We must be a people that assemble and congregate together to pray.

There was also an awareness of God and His presence. You can't really pray unless you are aware of the presence of God. It says here that they lifted up their voice to God. They were aware of His presence. They were not merely looking at their present circumstances, they were looking to God. They believed with God there was no problem too great, there was no need beyond the resources of God. They believed that God was able, so they prayed. Do we believe that in this day and age? Do we believe that God

is able? That God is able to fix any problem, He's able to fix any situation? If so, then we ought to pray. Then we ought to lift up our voice to the One who is able.

They were casting themselves upon God. They were leaning upon God. They were also drawing from God. That's what we do when we pray. We not only are petitioning God, but we are drawing from God. In other words, we're being strengthened. There they were, praying.

There was an acknowledgement of God's power. There in Acts 4:24, *“And when they heard that, they lifted up their voice to God with one accord, and said, Lord, thou art God, ...”* Notice where they began their prayer. They did not begin with the threats of the Sanhedrin. They began with God. They began by praising God and declaring the greatness of God. That's where they began and I believe that's important. So often we begin our prayers with whatever our circumstance is at that moment, that's where we begin and that's where we end. You look at prayer all through the word of God and that's not the case. They begin with God. I believe there's a reason for that. Because, when you begin with God, by acknowledging God, by acknowledging the presence of God, the greatness of God, that is what prepares you to really pray. Here's where they began, *“Lord thou art God.”* They didn't begin with the threat of the enemy. They began with the authority of God.; their eyes are upon the authority of God. They realize that God, who created everything, is the God who controls everything. You can read Acts 4:25-28 and see that's what they're acknowledging. They're acknowledging that God is God and in control of everything.

Just think of this church's situation. They've preached, they've been faithful, and now they've been told to stop. What would we do today? What would be the first thing we do if we were told to stop? It should be to pray. But, let's be honest, for many churches, that would not be the first thing. The first thing they would do was to hold a meeting, *“We've got to come up with a plan.”* No, the first

thing is you pray. If the first thing you do is plan, somebody is going to stand up and say, "I know a lawyer, we need to get a hold of him." The next thing you know, you're hiring a lawyer. The first thing we need to do is pray. If God tells the church, "Hire a lawyer," then you hire a lawyer. But, the first thing you do is to pray.

If prayer is not the first thing, and you have a meeting, you plan, and someone says "We need to hire a lawyer", someone else says "I'm tired of this. We're not going to put up with this. We're going to make some picket signs. We're going down to the village hall and we're going to march." What's that going to fix? Their impulse was, they prayed. You know, individually and collectively, our first impulse says much about us. It really does. It speaks volumes about us. The first thing they did was they prayed. They realized that everything was in God's hand. I mean, what hope did they have against the powerful Sanhedrin? What could they do? They did what they could, they prayed. We must be a church of prayer. They lifted up their voice to God. As you read their prayer, their prayer was reverent, their prayer was believing.

They also realized God's sufficiency, for their present situation. Acts 4:29, says "*And now,*" that word now shows the urgency of their prayer, "*Lord, behold their threatenings:*" They didn't pray, "Lord kill the Sanhedrin." All they did was say, "Lord behold their threatenings." Lord, they have threatened us. Lord, we're leaving that with you. You do with that as you see fit. Lord, we're just going to leave it with you. That's what we need to do with the enemies of the Lord's churches. Hand them over to God. Just hand them over to the Lord. Lord here they are, behold what they've done, we're leaving them with you. God will work. There were threatenings, and realizing the greatness of God, they simply spread their case before the Lord. Their well being was being threatened, the work of the Lord, humanly speaking, was being threatened. They just simply took the matter to the Lord. They said Lord here it is. Here's

what they've said, here's what they've done, we're leaving it with you. You see, prayer was the business at hand. If we're going to be the church that people need, we must realize the sufficiency of God so much so, that it is our first impulse to bring all matters to God in prayer.

There was a fervency and urgency in their prayers. We see that in the word “*now*” in verse 29. But what was it that they prayed for? Did they pray, “Lord deliver us from this persecution. Lord we've been treated unfairly, Lord we're being treated unjustly, Lord do something about it, Lord deliver us from that.” That's not how they prayed. They just left that with the Lord they said, Lord behold their threatenings, and that was the end of that. We spend much of our praying telling the Lord all about our circumstances. But, they just left it, Lord behold, here it is.

Then, what was it that they prayed? Acts 4:29, says, “*And now, Lord, behold their threatenings: and grant*” that's grace, anytime God grants anybody anything that's grace, “*unto thy servants*”, they've taken the position of the servants, they are the servants of God, “*that with all boldness they may speak thy word.*” Lord behold their threatenings. They're threatening was, “You stop preaching Jesus.” “Lord, you behold their threatenings, we're leaving that matter with you. Now, Lord we're praying that you'll give us the grace, strength, courage, that you'll give us the and conviction to just keep on preaching the word of God”

They're praying that God would enable them to do what God had called them to do. That's how we ought to pray. Lord, here's our circumstances. We leave all of those circumstances with you. Now Lord, give us the grace to do and to be what you would have us to do and what you'd have us to be. That's what they prayed. They did not pray for deliverance. They did not pray for more favorable circumstances. They simply took the position of needy servants realizing their responsibility to Him. They said, “Lord cause us, by thy grace, to do what you've called us to

do. God cause us, by thy grace, to be what you've called us to be.”

If the government comes in and says, “You all have one week to stop doing what you're doing or else”, what are we going to do? Pray. Pray! What are we going to pray about? “Lord give us the grace to do what you have called us to do. Give us the grace to be what you've called us to be.” We can tell the Lord about the circumstances, “Lord they threatened us, we have one week”. Leave that with God. Behold their threatenings, but Lord we need to be what you want us to be, we need to do what you want us to do. This is how we need to be praying. We live in terrible times. We live in times where people are compromising on every hand. What we need to simply pray is, “Lord give us the grace to do what you would have us to do. Give us the grace to be what you'd have us to be.”

Churches can go through very difficult times. Churches, just like an individual life, have seasons. Sometimes everything is going smoothly. At other times people are dying, and other times people are sick. There are times there are sin problems. We go through seasons. Through it all, our impulse ought to be to lift up our voice, one voice, to God in prayer saying, “Lord give us the grace, people are dying, people are sick, people are in sin, but Lord we just pray and we leave all that with you. Lord, we pray that you give us the grace to just keep on going and keep on doing what you would have us to do.”

We get sidetracked sometimes in our praying. This church at Jerusalem realized what was the priority. That was to continue to do what God had called them to do. If we're going to be the church that people need, in this day of error, when error is becoming more and more appealing, and even becoming appealing to some church members, when sin is becoming more and more appealing to the world, but not only to the world, to some church members, the church needs with one voice to pray. “God help us to be what people need. God help us to keep on standing for the truth.” You see it's

not for you and I to come up with the solutions, God already has the solutions. We just need strength, we just need grace.

Then we have the results of them praying together. There was a manifestation of the spirit of God. Acts 4:31, says *“And when they had prayed, the place was shaken ...”* I believe that's literal. I believe that God was so present that the pillars in that building began to shake, they could feel the presence of God. That's praying! When you have the visible presence of God, that's praying. That will give you encouragement. That will give you the conviction to go on. *“And when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled ...”* They were gathered there to pray, they were congregated, they were convening, and the place was shaken. There was a visible presence of the Lord. We need the visible presence of the Lord today. We need the vivid realization of the presence of God. We need a vivid realization that God is here. There's no sense in having church if God isn't here. We need a vivid realization that God is here. They had that after they prayed.

There was also power. Remember they prayed, “Lord grant us that we might preach thy word with boldness.” I believe their prayer was answered. There was power to live for the Lord and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost. That was God granting them the power to preach with boldness. Then they continued to do what they were called to do and spoke the word of God with boldness. They were able to carry on. What we need today is not more modernization, more resources. That's not what we need. We need the power of God. It comes through this kind of praying.

Notice Acts 4:32. They have prayed together. I believe this increased their love for one another. It wasn't that they didn't love each other before, but they loved each other more. They became even more and more unified in heart and soul. *“And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul: neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but*

they had all things common.” They prayed together and their love for one another grew. Their concern for one another grew. There's something about praying together that draws people together. That's what happened here. All the planning and scheming of man will not draw people together, because we all have different plans, and we all have different opinions. But I'll tell you what will draw them together is for them to lift up their voice to God and pray.

We see also that the beauty of Christ was upon them. In Acts 4:33 it says, *“And with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus: and great grace was upon them all.”* You could see the beauty of Christ in their lives. We need to be a praying church. If we're going to be the church that people need, we must commit to pray.

It thrills me when a lost person will say, “Have the church pray for me.” That thrills me. That shows they're paying attention to something. We need to commit to praying that we would have a more keen awareness of God in our midst. We need to pray that God would move mightily in our midst. So much so, that the complacent would be stirred to do something, that the unexcited would be excited, that the unmoved would be moved. We need to pray. It's easy to get angry. It's a lot more difficult to pray. Anybody can get mad at what somebody did, but it takes a spiritual person to pray. We need to be a praying church.

I believe if we pray like this first church did, we will see God's power in our lives. We need to pray that God would change lives. “Lord here they are, we leave them with you.” I learned a long time ago I can't fix anybody. I can't fix myself. Just leave the matter with the Lord. Pray that chains would be broken. You realize that every single church service there are many people that come in here dragging their chains. They're in bondage. “Oh God break their chains. Break whatever chains that might be holding us.”

Commit to praying for children. Commit to praying for the little ones that God would save their souls, that God would protect them from sin and error and the wolves. Pray.

Oh it's easy to blame. Anybody can blame. But pray. Pray for moms and dads. It gets harder by the day to raise children. Moms and dads need prayer, moms and dads need to be praying together. Pray for teens and young adults, pray for one another, pray for marriages, pray for homes. We need to commit to praying. Praying that the truth will be preached. "Lord that the truth would always be preached from our pulpit, and Lord that you'd give us the grace to always to stand for what is right, to always to stand for the truth. Lord give us courage, Lord give us steadfastness, Lord give us some stick-to-it-ness." We need to commit to praying. Commit to praying that God would grant us the ability and the burden and the power to do what we ought to do, and to be what we ought to be.

We need to be praying for missionaries. We need to be praying for the Lord's churches. We need to be a people of prayer and most importantly that must be our impulse. That must be just what we do. We pray, we band together and we pray.

I don't know what it's going to take to get some of God's people to pray. It's hard to say what it will take, but that needs to be our impulse. That's true individually. You hear that someone is sick, your impulse ought to be Lord help them. Your impulse ought to be to pray for them. You hear that someone is wayward. Your impulse, your immediate impulse ought to be to pray for them. Not, "Oh how could they do that?" Pray for them. "Did you hear what so and so said?" Your immediate impulse ought to be to pray. We need to be a people who have the impulse, the inclination, to pray. A praying church is the kind of church that people need, because we all need prayer. Everybody needs prayer. If we're going to be what people need we need to be a praying church.

We need to take praying very seriously. As we see the day approaching, so much the more ought we to be praying. In these times, the day is approaching where people are more interested in recreation, more interested in their

own self interest than they are banding together with God's people to pray. God help us to be a people of prayer.

“Well you don't understand, I don't like praying out loud.” No one said you had to. Band together in prayer. What should we be doing when someone else is praying? What should you be doing when we call on somebody to pray? We call on a brother to pray. What should we all be doing while that brother is praying? We ought to be praying. That's what we ought to all be doing all the time.

All through the preaching we ought to be praying. All through the service we ought to be praying. When a brother is leading singing we ought to be praying. We ought to be singing, we ought to be praying. Always be praying. When we go home from services we ought to pray.

If Someone makes you angry, if someone hurts your feelings, pray for them. I guarantee you if you continue to pray for somebody you can not stay angry with them. It's not possible. Try it. I mean you continually pray for them every single day. You can't remain angry. You are going to let go of one of the two. You're either going to let go of the anger or stop praying. If somebody upsets you, pray. It needs to be our impulse. God help us to be a praying church.

Chapter 11

Maintaining True Worship

“... the true worshippers shall worship
the Father in spirit and in truth: ...”
– John 4:23

Continuing the series about being the church that people need, in John 4:23-24 Christ's talking to the woman at the well. Jesus is doing the speaking, "*But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such,*" this is those who worship in spirit and truth, "*to worship him. God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.*"

In these verses, Jesus speaks of worship, which is one of the most important and misunderstood subjects in the word of God today. As He speaks upon this subject, you'll notice in verse 24, He uses the imperative, "*they that worship must*" to stress the importance of worship. It also states that worship has an established and an unbending standard, and that there are no alternatives, substitutes, or replacements. *They that worship Him must.* Worship of God can not be in a self-styled manner or just however people feel, however people want to worship. There's a "*must*" here.

Concerning worship, He also says that there are true worshipers, referring to those who worship in accordance with a standard, those who worship correctly and accurately. Since it says there are true worshipers, that implies that there are false worshipers, that there is a worship that is erroneous. There is a worship that is correct and there is a worship that is incorrect. There is true worship, there is false worship. There is genuine worship, and there is counterfeit worship.

Jesus said in verse 23, "*... the true worshipers shall worship the Father ...*" Therefore, true worship must have the proper object, that being God the Father. God is also our motive for worship. You can not worship a goddess and have true worship, there has to be the worship of God the Father. You can't just worship what you think is God.

We also see that true worship is in spirit. That speaks of the nature and the character of worship. It is to be done spiritually. I believe that it can only be done by those who have a spiritual nature. I don't believe a lost man can

worship the Lord in spirit and in truth, which is the only worship the Lord accepts. So it is done spiritually, which is the opposite of that which is external.

We see not only the nature of worship, but that it must be done in truth. That is, it must be according to truth. He went on to say, "*for the Father seeketh such*", those who worship in spirit and truth, "*to worship him.*" That means that He desires such, He delights in such, He accepts such worship. It's not that He needs true worship, but He is pleased with true worship. Since God seeks true worship, that tells us that how you worship is not a matter of indifference to God, because He seeks such to worship Him. There are people today who say, "Well it doesn't matter." Well, it does matter! "They must worship me", in spirit and truth and God seeketh such to worship Him. God is not indifferent concerning the way that you and I worship. God is not indifferent concerning how we worship.

Jesus also declares the nature of God. He says, God is a spirit in John 4:24. In the context of that, He speaks the imperative. "*God is a spirit and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth.*" In other words, because of who and what God is, He must be worshiped in a certain and specific way. God is a spirit, therefore, we must worship in spirit and in truth.

Most of what is termed worship today is centered around the flesh rather than the spiritual. It is external, outward, rather than internal. Most worship today is very inconsiderate of the person, nature and character of God and therefore, it is not in reverence. All worship must be in reverence.

Worship of God can not be in a self-styled manner. Worship that is pleasing to the flesh is not acceptable to God. The only worship acceptable to God, first of all, must have a right motive, a right object. God must be the object. Not the God that you invent in your heart and mind; it must have God the Father as the object. There has to be a right attitude, it must be in spirit, there must be a right standard, and there

must be truth. Anything else is classified, under what Jesus called in Matthew 15:8-9, as vain worship. It's a waste of time. It's empty. It means nothing.

It is also ignorant worship. In Acts 17:22-23, remember Paul on Mars hill? He referred to the God "*whom you ignorantly worship.*" Worship outside of worshiping God in spirit and truth is ignorant worship and is also classified as "will worship." Colossians 2:23 speaks of will worship, that is worship in a self-styled manner. It speaks of just worshiping however you feel, however you please, however you determine. That's "will worship". It's all vain and a waste of time.

One of the primary functions of the church is to worship God. That is one of our primary functions. When we assemble, it is to worship, it is to worship God, and therefore, there must be a proper environment and a proper atmosphere. Churches can get in such a way that they no longer have a proper environment and a proper atmosphere to worship God. Your heart must be right with God in order to have a proper environment, in order to have a proper atmosphere. If there is fussing, fighting, and warring going on, that is not conducive to worshiping God in spirit and truth.

When the objective is to draw a crowd, keep the people coming, be loved and accepted, be popular, as we have already seen, we begin to add to and take from the things of God. When those things become our objective, we begin to add to the worship. The only thing you and I can add is that which is of the flesh. We begin to add and subtract from worship. All of this, as Jeremiah 2:33 says, in order to be loved.

The desire to be loved, the desire to be accepted by the world, has resulted in the secularization of worship. It has resulted in the modernizing and the revamping of the worship service in an attempt to give the ungodly what they want. Worship is changed. I tell you today, worship does not need to be updated. Worship never needs to be updated,

because we are worshipping God and God does not change and worship is according to truth and truth does not change. Worship does not need updating and worship services do not need updating. We can worship without a piano, an organ, pews, air conditioning, any of those things. Those things are not necessary to worship. We're not criticizing any of those things, but those things are not necessary for worship.

What is necessary is that our hearts are right with God. The desire for love and acceptance by the world, the desire of popularity with the world, any attempt to give the ungodly what they want, has turned what should be worship of God into entertainment. If you're going to draw the ungodly, you're going to have to entertain their flesh. Just preaching the word of God is not going to draw the ungodly. Even if they come in, and unless God does a work in their heart, just preaching the word of God, is not going to keep them coming. If you want to keep them coming, if that's your concern, you're going to have to do something that appeals to their flesh, unless God is working upon their heart.

This desire to be loved and accepted has turned worship services into entertainment and the amusement of the ungodly. Spiritual songs begin to be replaced with music and songs that appeal to the flesh of man. This desire to be loved and accepted has turned what should be the house of worship into a social gathering and activity center. It has shifted the focus from God to man. You can not worship unless the focus is on God. You can not give the enemies of God and the ungodly what they want and maintain a proper environment and a proper atmosphere for worship.

This message is on the subject of maintaining true worship. If we're going to be the church that people need, we must maintain a proper environment, a proper atmosphere of worship, and we must maintain true worship. Therefore, it becomes incumbent upon every member of Home Baptist Church or every member of a local body to worship God in spirit and in truth.

MAINTAINING TRUE WORSHIP

Every member of one of the Lord's local churches has entered into covenant agreement to sustain the worship of that local body. That is an agreement that we have made with the spirit of God. That is an agreement that members of the Lord's local churches have entered into with one another, that each church member will sustain the worship of the church body they belong to. That means we'll keep our hearts right, that means that we'll be here. It also means that we'll keep our hearts right with God, that we'll keep our hearts in a condition to worship the Lord.

This means that there must be a guarding against all intrusions. There are many intrusions to true worship. We could preach another message on that subject. Self will, worldliness, a wrong spirit, all of these things are intrusions to true worship. It is absolutely necessary, if we're going to be the church that people need, we must maintain true worship.

In maintaining worship, we must maintain all the ingredients of worship. I believe most of the ingredients of true worship are illustrated in Abraham offering his son, Issac. The story is told in Genesis 22:1-14. We want to point out several things from these verses.

First of all, worship involves a revelation from God. Worship involves God revealing Himself. It involves you and I responding to what God has revealed and to the word of God. In Genesis 22:1-2, God comes to Abraham and tells him what He wanted him to do. "I want you to go and I want you to offer your son." This is not something that Abraham came up with; this is something God told him to do. The way to worship is not what you and I come up with, it is simply the revelation of God. Then Abraham, of course, as you read through the verses, obeyed God, which tells us that worship must be in accordance with the word of God. This is what Jesus said; it is in spirit and truth.

God and Abraham were in contact there in verses 1-2. There must be contact with God. You can not worship if you do not come into contact with the Lord. Unless you come

into contact with the Lord, you're not doing any better than bowing down to a statue. There has to be contact with the Lord. If there is no contact with the Lord, then our hearts are not right. If there's no contact with the Lord then we've missed the whole point of worship. How often people go through the motions of worship, but they never come into contact with the Lord. Some never ever come close. It's not worship. It's all vain. It's all empty.

Worship involves preparation. In Genesis 22:2, God instructed Abraham. He said, *"Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah;"*, he was to go to a specific place, you can't just go anywhere, *"and offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of."* Then in verse 3, *"And Abraham rose up early in the morning, and saddled his ass, and took two of his young men with him, and Isaac his son, and clave the wood for the burnt offering, and rose up, and went unto the place of which God had told him."* He put a saddle on the mule, he cut all the wood. What Abraham was doing here was making preparations to do what God had told them to do. You can not worship without preparation.

Worship requires a preparation of heart. John said, in Revelations 1: 9, *"I was in the spirit on the Lord's day."* That doesn't just happen automatically. Sunday doesn't just roll around and all of a sudden you're in the spirit on the Lord's day. It takes preparation. It takes preparation to worship the Lord, it requires a preparation of the heart, dying to self, drawing close to the Lord, getting ready to worship the Lord. That's why I believe it is important what you do on Saturday evening, because you ought to be preparing for Sunday worship on Saturday evening.

We also see worship is by faith and obedience to the Lord. In Genesis 22:3, *"he went to the place of which God had told him."* He did exactly what God said. You can't be disobedient and worship God. You have to worship Him just as he says. This, of course, requires faith, this requires obedience to the Lord.

We see that worship involves a costly presentation to God. In Genesis 22:2, God told Abraham that, concerning his only son Issac. In verse 9, *“And they came to the place which God had told him of; and Abraham built an altar there,”* there is more preparation, *“and laid the wood in order,”* more preparation, *“and bound Isaac his son, and laid him on the altar upon the wood. And Abraham stretched forth his hand, and took the knife to slay his son.”*

Worship is not something that's cheap. It's you and I making a presentation to God. They were to bring the first fruits to the house of God. They were to do so in thanksgiving. There was to be a presentation. Here Abraham was to present his son to the Lord. This was the very failure of Israel in the days of Malachi in Malachi 1:7-8. God was offended by their offerings. He said, *“... you bring the blind, the lame, why don't you take them to your governor and see if he wants them.”* We have a tendency to do that. We have a tendency to give God less than we would give man. God rebuked Israel for that. Worship is to be the best we can present to the Lord. It is not something that's cheap. There must be a willingness to present the very best that we have.

Worship also involves a separation unto God. In Genesis 22:5, *“And Abraham said unto his young men, Abide ye here with the ass; and I and the lad will go yonder and worship, and come again to you.”* Abraham believed that God was going to spare Issac, he said we will come again unto you. Worship requires faith, too. Worship requires a separation, *“We go yonder”*, we go yonder and worship. In order for you and I to worship God, we have to say to all of our home cares, to all of our business affairs, to all of our hobbies, to all of our recreations, to all of our worldly interests, *“abide ye here while I go yonder and worship the Lord.”* When we come into the house of God, we're to leave everything else behind. That means not only physically, but that means mentally. We are to leave, we are to get all of those things out of our mind as we come to worship God.

That's not an easy thing to do and it requires a lot of effort and a lot of preparation. You can't just stumble into the house of God and worship; it doesn't happen that way. There has to be a separation.

This is a separation, a withdrawing from the world, and a drawing near to God. In a day of cellphones, (I'm not going to get off on this because I'd go on and on,) we don't know anything about withdrawing from this world. We really don't. People drag their cellphones to church. What are you going to do if you get a call? What are you going to do, get up and leave? "Well it's an emergency." What did they do in emergencies before they had a cellphone? What you're doing is you're saying, "I'm going to worship God, but if I get this call, sorry God." We don't know what it is to separate from the world anymore. We really don't. As a result, there is very little worship of the Lord. Worship involves a separation from the world.

Worship involves a renunciation of self. In Genesis 22:6, Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering, laid it upon Issac his son, that's a renunciation of self. For Abraham to lay that wood on his son, he had to deny himself. He had to deny every human feeling, every human emotion that he was having at that time. He had to deny it all. There was a renunciation of self. That is something we know very little of today.

Worship involves thoughtfulness. You do not come to worship empty headed. Worship requires great thought. Worship requires meditation. There in verse 6, as he's preparing the wood and he's laying the wood upon Issac, his son, don't you think Abraham was thinking? Certainly he was. He took the fire in his hand, and the knife, they went both of them together. I believe Abraham was thinking very deeply. Not necessarily about his son but about God. *"And Isaac spake unto Abraham his father; and said, My father: and he said, Here am I, my son. And he said, Behold the fire and the wood: but where is the lamb for a burnt offering? And Abraham said, My son, God will provide himself a*

lamb". He gave great thought. Worship requires great thoughtfulness.

We also see worship involves an open ear and yielding to God's word. In Genesis 22:10 we see, "*And Abraham stretched forth his hand, and took the knife to slay his son. And the angel of the LORD called unto him out of heaven, and said, Abraham, Abraham: and he said, Here am I.*" Isaiah 6 is a good picture of this also. Isaiah heard God speak. His ear was open and there was a response to the Lord. We see that there must be an open ear and there must be a yielding to the word of God. God spoke and Abraham said, "Lord Here am I, here am I."

Worship involves a recognition and a proclamation of God's goodness and greatness. Verse 14, "*And Abraham called the name of that place Jehovahjireh: as it is said to this day, In the mount of the LORD it shall be seen.*" After all was said and done, Abraham recognized the goodness and the grace and the mercy of God. Abraham proclaimed the goodness and grace of God. In all worship there is a proclamation of the greatness of God. All worship must have a proclamation of the greatness of God, all worship must be for the honor of God.

If we're going to be the church that people need, we have to maintain true worship. That means a maintaining of the ingredients of worship. It also means a maintaining of a love and desire for the house of worship. You know God did not tell the gentiles in the old testament, "go to the place that I have chosen." He told that to His chosen people. "You go to the place where I have chosen." If there was to be a sacrifice made, if they were to worship God, if they were to bring an offering to God, they were to go to the place where God had chosen. God still has a chosen place today, that being the Lord's house. That's where we're to worship.

There must be a maintaining of a love and a desire for the house of God. Notice in Psalm 84:1, the Psalmist reveals his heart's desire for the Lord's house. He says, "*How amiable are thy tabernacles, O LORD of hosts!*" That is, the

house of God to him was delightful, it was very pleasing, it was a place where he found pleasure. Not fleshly pleasure, but a place where he found spiritual pleasure. It was a place that he found fascinating, where he found satisfaction, that he saw as a beautiful place, a place that he relished. He said in Psalm 26:8, *“I have loved the habitation of thy house”*. He said, I love being in the house of God, I love being there. In Psalm 122:1, he said, *“I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the LORD.”* If we're going to be the church that people need, the members of Home Baptist Church must find God's house to be a place of delight, a place of pleasure, the most fascinating, most interesting, most satisfying, and the most beautiful place in the world to us. The place we relish to be more than anywhere else. This is to show in our words, attitudes, and practice. For those tonight who say, “Oh the house of God means so much to me”, and yet every chance they get, they're gone, they say differently by their practice. They say that they have other interests. What if every other member in the church did that. You wouldn't be the church that people need because you wouldn't even be a church.

The place of worship was the most desirable in the world for the Psalmist. The reason is, because he recognized it as the Lord's. He said in Psalm 84:1, *“thy tabernacles”*. In verse 2, he referred to it as “the courts of the Lord”. In verse 3, *“thine alters”*. In verse 4, *“thy house”*. In verse 10, *“thy courts”*, and *“the house of my God”*. He recognized it as the house of the Lord. It belonged to God. It belongs to the Lord. For that reason alone, it ought to be precious. But, that's not the only reason. That's where God meets with His people.

As you read through the Psalm 84, you see that the psalmist found safety in the house of God. He began to look about and meditate upon the sparrows that had built a nest in the house of God. In verse 3 he said, *“Yea, the sparrow hath found an house, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may lay her young”*. That's what the house of God is. It's a

home where you can bring up your children. *“Even thine altars, O LORD of hosts, my King, and my God. Blessed are they that dwell in thy house:”* Not those who frequented it every now and then, blessed are they who dwell there. They're always there. Blessed are these people.

Then notice Psalms 84:10, *“... a day in thy courts is better than a thousand.”* A day in thy courts is better than a thousand. A thousand days is 2 years and 9 months. He'd rather spend one day in the house of God, and that's better than 2 years and 9 months anywhere else. That's what he is saying. I'm sorry, but there aren't very many that believe that today. There are very few.

Again verse 10, *“For a day in thy courts is better than a thousand.”* He said that as a matter of fact; just stated it as a fact, as a matter of certainty and conviction. One single day in the Lord's house is better than a thousand anywhere else. It's better than a thousand days of family reunions, vacation, visiting, hunting, fishing, going to a ball game. One day is better than a thousand days out on the lake. There aren't many that believe that. That's what the Psalmist believed.

When he says, *“it is better”*, he means it's superior, more advantageous, more useful, more valuable to me than a thousand days anywhere else. And yet today, people say, “Oh, I've got an opportunity of a lifetime to go to such and such. I won't be there the next 2 or 3 Sundays, but this is the opportunity of a lifetime.” In other words, they're saying, “I don't believe that a day in the Lord's house is better than a thousand days of what I'm about to do, I don't believe it.” The Palmist said a day in the Lord's house is better than 2 years and 9 months anywhere else.

That being his conviction, he went on to say, *“I had rather”*, that speaks of preference; I prefer, I would prefer to, *“be a doorkeeper”*, the lowest position in God's house at that time, *“in the house of my God, than to dwell in the tents of wickedness.”* Oh, I would prefer to take the lowest position in the house of God than to be with ungodly wicked sinners

of the world. I prefer that. God help us because this is the attitude that we need if we're going to maintain a spirit of worship. The house of God was amiable, it was desirable to the Psalmist. We can not be the church that people need if we do not love the house of the Lord.

We can not be the church that people need if we are not a people of worship. We have to worship the Lord. Choosing not to worship in God's house, is what Hebrews 10:25 talks about, "... *forsaking the assembly of ourselves ... , as the manner of some is; ...* ", or as the habit of some is. It's a habit, it's a bad habit. I don't care if it's 3 months, 6 months, 9 months. It's their habit and it's bad.

When any member gets in a habit of forsaking the assembling of themselves, they are no longer sustaining the worship of Home Baptist Church. Put any time limit you want on it, that's not what it's truly about. It's their habit, it's "*as the manner of some is.*" There's enough people that are smart enough to play the game, "I'll come once every 3 months, I'll come once every 6 months whatever the church's rule is." It's their habit. To me it doesn't matter, you come once every 3 months, you ought to be disciplined. "Well, the church says every three months." It's their habit. You've got a habit of forsaking the assembly of yourself. (That's another message also. The trouble with preaching on church attendance is, the ones that need to hear it aren't here.)

Choosing, (Yes, I said CHOOSING), not to worship in God's house demonstrates thinking lightly upon spiritual things. I've been told a million times, "You can't know my heart." No, I can't know everything that's going on in it. Or, "You can't know my relationship with God." Oh yes I can. You're not in God's house, you chose not to be there, I guarantee you do not have a very good relationship with the Lord. It involves a choosing not to do that which is known to be right. A child of God, a church member, knows the right thing to do is to be in God's house. When you choose not to be there, you're choosing not to do what you KNOW is right, and that of course is wrong.

MAINTAINING TRUE WORSHIP

It's also choosing not to give or receive needed encouragement. We see in Hebrews 10, that we're to assemble to encourage one another and you choose not to do that. Then they have the audacity to say, "I haven't been there in 6 months and only 2 people called me." How many did you call in those 6 months? You chose not to receive encouragement by staying away. You chose that. That's a choice that you made.

It contributes to spiritual ignorance. "Well I can worship God at home." Not according to God's word. You can't do that and dismiss God's house. You can't do that while you're forsaking God's house. You can't worship God anywhere you're in the spirit to worship. You have to be in the right spirit to worship.

It sets a bad example, a terrible example to young people. It sets a terrible example to every member of the church. It's a discouragement to others, and you choose to do that. It demonstrates one's priorities are not properly arranged. Choosing not to assemble is one of those things, if everyone else chose to do what you're doing, there wouldn't be a church.

If we're going to be the church that people need, we must maintain true worship. There must be an atmosphere, there must be an environment where we can worship the Lord. We must come with our hearts right with God in order to worship the Lord. Years and years and years ago, there was a man who was very inconsistent with his church attendance, but at the same time he was very good at inviting others to church, which I could never figure out. One Sunday morning, somebody that he invited came. Guess what? The one who invited them wasn't there. The man asked, and I said, "I don't know where he is." He came 2 or 3 weeks in a row and never did see the one who invited him. How sad. We need to have a love for God's house.

I realize that things happen, and we can't always get to the house of God. But, I also realize that many times people choose, they make choices, "I'm not going to be in

God's house today.” They make that choice. They make that choice a week before. They may make it the night before. “I'm not going to be there.”

The longer they stay away, the harder it becomes to go, because now, they take the attitude, “Well when I come, people are going to be judging me.” Let me tell you something, they already have! You haven't been there; you chose not to be there; what does that tell me? That tells me you don't care. If you begin to forsake the assembling of yourself, don't tell me how everybody in church is uncaring. I don't want to hear it; I don't have any patients for it. Don't tell me that, because by you not being there, you're the uncaring one. You're the one that doesn't care.

Don't tell me that you're praying for everybody that's there. You don't even know what's going on. People get mad at me because I did not call them and tell them that so and so was having surgery. “If you would have been here, you would have known. I didn't know you cared, I really didn't think you cared or you'd have been here and you would have known. I'm not going out of my way to let you know everything that's going on at the church that you should have been at.” God help us to maintain a love for the house of God.

There's a hunger to be in God's house. When David wrote these Psalms, he wasn't able to be in the house of God. He was longing for the house of God. He was a fugitive. How many times do people weep because they can't be in the house of God as often as they want because of health reasons or whatever. They are broken hearted. Then, you have people who just choose, and it doesn't bother them a bit. They just decide, “I'm not going.” God help us to always have that love, to always have that desire for the Lord's house.

Chapter 12

Seeking Of Spiritual Excellence

“... as ye are zealous of spiritual gifts,
seek that ye may excel ...”

– 1st Corinthians 14:12

In 1st Corinthians 14:12, *“Even so ye, forasmuch as ye are zealous of spiritual gifts, seek that ye may excel to the edifying of the church.”* Paul is writing to the local body at Corinth. This was a church that, as we all know, had many problems, struggles, divisions, and contentions; and problems were caused by these divisions. There were errors on many fronts in the church. Paul wrote 1st and 2nd Corinthians to address some of these issues.

The letters of 1st and 2nd Corinthians really reveal the sad state and condition that all the churches of the Lord can slide into simply by regarding the wisdom and philosophy of the world rather than the council of the Lord. All you have to do is heed to the council and philosophy of the world, and you have problems. That's true in our individual lives and in our church lives as well.

In these letters, specifically in 1st Corinthians 12, Paul addresses each member has a vital connection to Christ, the head. This connection, this relationship between the members of the church, individually and between them and Christ, is vital and essential to the health of the church. A church can only be spiritually healthy if there is a proper relationship between members and Jesus Christ. Congregating together is no magic formula for a healthy relationship with the Lord if the members are living a life that's not in a close relationship with the Lord. If we, as a church, as an assembly, do not have a proper relationship with the Lord when we congregate, we can not possibly be spiritually healthy. If we're going to be the church that people need, then it is crucial that each and every member must have a proper relationship to the Lord.

If a church is going to be what people need, then the members must be spiritually right. You can preach truth, the church can preach truth, the church can write up a statement of faith, and they can be as sound as can be, but if the members are not spiritually right, the church isn't right. That has to be. It doesn't matter, you can have a statement of faith, and that can be sound, but that doesn't make you right.

The only way you can be right is for each member to be right.

We as individual members must have a right attitude toward the spiritual, if we're going to be the church that people need. We, of course, live in very wicked times. We all know this. We live in times where sin, defiance of God and God's authority is rampant. There's an openness about sin that we have never seen in our lifetime. It's a time when people are seeking to force their sinful lifestyles, rebellious, ungodly lifestyles, not only on society, but they try to force these things upon the Lords churches as well. You can find a church, an assembly that will let you do just about anything you want to do. You don't have to bring it here, because we're not going to allow you to do that. You might as well go somewhere else. But they don't want to do that because they're enemies to the truth and the Lord's house. In spite of all of that, we can still be the church that people need.

We live in times when wrong is defended and right is mocked and ridiculed and made fun of. But, we can still be the church that people need in spite of all those things. In order to do that, we must not become the world. If we become the world, we cease to be what people need. If we become the world we can no longer help people. We can no longer be what they need.

We live in a day where the term great churches, "that's a great church", is thrown around very often. But a church can not be great if it's not what people need. If it's not what the ungodly need, I don't care whatever else they may offer, they can not possibly be great. A church can not be what people need if the members of the church are not what people need. If our individual lives are not what people need, if our individual lives are what people want rather than what people need, when we congregate, it doesn't just magically happen that we then become the church that people need. Everything depends on our own personal relationship with the Lord. A church can only be great if it is what an ungodly, humanistic society needs. A church can

not be the church that people need if the members are not spiritually right.

1st Corinthians 14:12, contains an exhortation that is applicable to members of the Lord's churches everywhere. It is an exhortation that if we would give heed to, that if we would simply obey, we would prevent a lot of problems and we would be and will continue to be the church that people need.

There are five key words that we want to notice here in 1st Corinthians 14:12; zealous, spiritual, seek, excel, and edify. These key words reveal our responsibility and duty. In these words we see what should be the desire of every single member of Home Baptist Church desire and any of the Lord's churches.

This message is on the seeking of spiritual excellence. If we're going to be the church that people need, we have to always be progressing spiritually. We can not cease to progress spiritually, because if we do, and it goes on for a period of time, you will cease to be the church that people need. I don't care how many new members you may add, and how many things you may do and how many visitors you may have, when a church ceases to progress spiritually, they are in serious, serious trouble. They are in danger of having the candlestick removed.

The "principle" stated in 1st Corinthians 14:12 is also stated in the second paragraph of the church covenant. That is, is stated in the second paragraph of the church covenant, which says, "We engage therefore by the aid of the Holy Spirit to strive for the advancement of this church in knowledge", that is each one of us needs to be growing, or progressing in knowledge, "in holiness", this is each one of us has a responsibility to progress in holiness; if we're going backward in these things, we're on the road to ceasing to be the church that people need; "to advance the church in comfort, to promote it's prosperity, and spirituality."

This is a promise, this is a pledge of taking an active interest in the church of which we are a member. It is a

pledge to be actively interested in the spiritual well being of the church. The only way to be interested in the spiritual well being of the church is for you and I to be interested in our own spiritual well being. We have a pledge here of participation in the spiritual progress and well being of this church. We each pledge that each one will do everything we can for the spiritual well being of Home Baptist Church, and as members we are responsible to and obligated to the church for that. The church is to hold us accountable. If you do not want accountability, then you should not be a member of one of the Lord's churches. The church has the right and authority to make you accountable, to cause you to give an account. It does matter how we live.

It should be our commitment to put forth whatever labor, exertion, and time that is needed to cause this church to be always moving forward in the spiritual realm, and never moving backward spiritually, but always moving forward spiritually. The danger of moving backward spiritually is, where does it stop? When are you going to stop it? You can't just stop it any time you please. Before long it gets out of control and then the church ceases to be what people need.

Each member has a responsibility to cause the church to increase, be developing, and advancing spiritually. In other words, we're to be a true addition to the church, not just a numerical addition. When we truly add to the spirituality of Home Baptist Church, that's a true addition. We must never get so interested in numerical progression that spiritual progression takes a back seat. Spiritual progression is always to come first.

First of all, in 1st Corinthians 14:12, there is such a thing as spiritual excellency. Notice the word "excel" in that verse. To excel is to exceed beyond, surpass, to be better than what we are, to shine forth. What it says here is, "*that ye may excel*". That phrase is indicative that there is more out there because we can excel. There is more out there for us to obtain, to grasp spiritually, to lay hold of spiritually.

Those words, “*that ye may excel*”, are indicative of a possibility, an opportunity. We have the possibility and the possibility exists, that you and I can excel spiritually. We have the opportunity for each one of us to exceed wherever we are spiritually, right now. There is and we have a possibility to surpass wherever we might be spiritually, right now. Therefore it becomes our responsibility, it becomes our duty.

There is the possibility to advance beyond where we are spiritually, to be better, to shine forth spiritually. This should be our desire, aspiration, and longing, to surpass, to go beyond, to go further than wherever we are spiritually right now. That's true of each and every member. Such is necessary if we're going to continue to be the church that people need.

There is an attitude necessary to excel. We see that in the words “zealous” and “seek”. There is a spiritual excellency and we are to zealously seek that which is spiritual. We are to be zealous of the spiritual, which means the spiritual is to have the priority, be foremost, be primary, and be supreme. Being the church that people need is not about being numerically or financially progressive. It's all about being spiritually progressive, about advancing spiritually. It's not about advancing in numbers, it's not about advancing in dollars, because we could have one or two million dollars in the bank and that still will not make us the church that we need to be, or the church that people need. We can fill the building to the point where we have to enlarge it, but that will not make you the church that people need. There has to be a spiritual advancement. We have to be spiritually healthy. That is the only way we can possibly be the church that people need. It's all about being spiritually progressive.

We're to be zealous to excel spiritually. That means each one of us is to have a passion to go beyond where we are. We are to be devoted, dedicated to excelling spiritually. Each one of us needs to personally take on the responsibility

that we are going to be devoted and dedicated to excelling spiritually.

To zealously seek means that we are enthusiastic about this. People can get very enthusiastic about a building program or when they see the treasury is growing. We ought to be enthusiastic about progressing spiritually. That's what ought to enthuse and excite us, that the church is progressing spiritually. It means that we're going to be eager, vigorous, and committed in this thing of excelling spiritually.

To excel spiritually, to zealously seek to excel spiritually is the opposite of indifference and apathy. You talk to almost any pastor of any denomination today, and ask them what the most discouraging thing is and almost all will say indifference and apathy. It's a discouraging thing. When I talk about indifference and apathy, I'm talking about it in the realm of the spiritual. There is a great indifference and apathy about spiritual things. We are to zealously seek, to go in search of spiritual excellence. We're to seek it, to go looking for spiritual excellence. We're to work toward it. Each one of us, as an individual member, has a responsibility to work toward spiritual excellence, to seek, to achieve, and obtain spiritual excellence. It's to be our goal, aim, and focus to excel spiritually. No matter where you are spiritually, there is a higher plain of spiritual living, a higher level to advance to. We ought to always be seeking that, and we ought to do so with great zeal.

The world and our culture continues to grow worse and worse. Unless we seek earnestly to excel spiritually, there is no way you can continue to be the church that people need. You can't sit still and be the church that people need. As the world is getting worse and worse, we need to be getting stronger and stronger spiritually to the same degree that the world is getting worse and worse.

What is happening today? Churches are being weakened spiritually by our culture, our society, and the world. If that trend continues, they will cease to be the church that people need. And once those trends are allowed

to continue, there are very few exceptions where they stop. Those are trends that you do not get out of. It's just like when a church starts surrendering things, you're not getting them back. Once you give it up, they're gone. We better be careful what we give away. I'm not talking about money. I'm talking about spiritual things. I'm talking about truth. We better be careful what we compromise on because what we give away, we're not going to get back.

We have to get out of the mindset of contentment when it comes to spiritual things. We can't be content where we are spiritually, as individuals or as a church. We have to get out of the mindset of mediocrity. We can't settle for the norm, for the ordinary, for the typical, because those things are pitiful in the spiritual realm. We can't settle for the usual, but instead, we have to have passion, devotion, dedication, commitment, enthusiasm, and with great eagerness, great energy, we as individuals must work toward and pursue spiritual excellence. That's the only way that a church can continue to be what people need.

To "*seek that we may excel*" means that we, with great passion and great energy, expend ourselves to a higher plane of spiritual living. It means that we have a greater desire, greater longing, that we're reaching for a higher ground, that we're pressing toward higher ground spiritually. We're willing to launch out in that direction, all in order to excel in the spiritual realm. That should be the desire for every single one of us. It's absolutely necessary if we're going to be the church that people need, to excel spiritually, to always be progressing in the spiritual realm, to be a spiritually progressive church.

The result of obtaining and always striving for spiritual excellency that we are to seek, "*that ye may excel to the edifying of the church.*" Seek to surpass where you are spiritually, seek to be better than whatever we are spiritually, in order to edify the church. If we seek zealously to reach spiritual excellency, this will have a positive, favorable, constructive, useful, beneficial, productive, effect upon the

church of which we are a member. That's really the only way that you and I can have a positive and favorable effect upon the church in which we are a member. We, ourselves, have to be progressing spiritually.

The word *edifying* means to build. “*Seek that ye may excel to the edifying of the church*”, to the building of the church. *Edifying* means to fashion, model, shape, increase, establish, confirm. Our spiritual condition, individually, goes toward either the building or the demolishing of Home Baptist Church. We need to take this seriously. Our own spiritual condition either goes toward the building of the church, or it goes toward the tearing of it down. It either goes toward the building of being the church that people need, or it causes us to cease to be the church that people need.

Our spiritual condition goes toward fashioning and shaping the church of which we are a member. We fashion it either favorable or unfavorably, by our own spiritual condition. Each one of us is either a favorable addition or an unfavorable addition. We are either adding to the spirituality of the church or we are taking away from the spirituality of the church. Our spiritual condition either contributes to the spiritual increase or it contributes to the demise of the church.

If you do not pray, read the scriptures, and take care of your heart as an individual, what happens if others are doing the same thing? What happens if a majority are doing the same thing? You're in serious trouble. You can come out with the greatest statement of faith that man has ever seen. That won't make you the church that people need. We have to individually be progressive spiritually.

Our spiritual condition is to go towards the spiritual support, the health of the church. Our spiritual condition is to assist the church spiritually of which we are a member. Our spiritual condition is to go toward the spiritual nourishment, continuance, and improvement of the church and our own spiritual conditions. “Oh we're strong, we

believe in such and such.” Are you right with God? How can a church be right if the members aren't right with God? We have to be right with the Lord, each one of us. Don't say, “Well, I'm just backslidden”, as if it's not a big deal. That's a big deal, because it has quite an effect, more than you and I realize. It has quite an effect upon the body of which we are a member.

Therefore we ought to, “*seek that ye may excel*”. Our spiritual condition determines whether or not we have a positive and favorable impression upon the church. Our spiritual condition determines whether you contribute to the strengthening of the church or to the weakening of the church. At churches I've pastored in the past, individuals, on different occasions, came to me and said, “You perhaps aren't aware of how much money I give to this church.” I don't care. That's not what it's about. I realize that we are to tithe and to give an offering, but how much you give isn't what makes a church what it ought to be. It's our spiritual condition.

We need to seek to excel. We ought to strive to excel. We ought to dedicate ourselves to excel spiritually. We ought to commit ourselves to excelling spiritually. It ought to show in our attitudes and behavior that we are committed to spiritual excellence. We're committed to that individually, we're committed to that collectively, as an assembly. We're committed to spiritual excellence.

Every time we assemble, it ought to be to this end to excel spiritually. That we might excel spiritually, that we might surpass where we are, that we might go beyond where we are. The truth is every week we ought to be stronger. The next time we meet, we ought to be a stronger church than we are today, and by next time we ought to be even stronger. We ought to be continually progressing, continually getting stronger and stronger and stronger. That does away with all the suggestions like, “Brother Dan, do you think we ought to do this to get more people in?” NO! That's not our focus. Our focus is to advance spiritually, and

that's not against inviting people to church at all. Invite as many as you can. But, no matter how many come, that's not what is going to make you to be the church that people need. What makes us the church that people need is to be spiritually right with God. We have to be spiritually right with the Lord, and we must continually progress spiritually. Everything we do, the preaching, teaching, and singing is to all to work to that end to progress spiritually. It's not about preaching messages that people are going like so they will come back. It's not about inventing a Sunday school system that will cause people to be more interested, or singing songs that will cause people to feel good. It's about progressing spiritually, going beyond where we are spiritually.

What a shame, when churches concentrate on everything but the spiritual. They concentrate on every other aspect, and there are many aspects in a church. There are financial aspects, you can't avoid it. There are maintenance aspects and on and on we can go. All of these things matter, but none of them ever take precedent over spiritual well being. That is always to be our priority.

This is why it is so important that we never lose sight of doing the Lord's business His way, not our way, for His honor and His glory, not our business for our honor and our glory. When that is our focus, the spiritual aspect is where it belongs. Seek ye first the kingdom of God. We can not lose sight of what it's all about.

As individuals, we need to be dedicated. There isn't a person here that is where we could be spiritually. We could all go further, we could all go beyond where we are, and we all hopefully realize that. What is our attitude? Are we going to just keep reaching forth for more and more and more spiritually? That ought to be our attitude, our spirit. "I'm not what I ought to be, but I'm going to continue to strive to be what I ought to be. I'm not where I ought to be spiritually, but I'm going to strive to be there, and I'm not going to stop striving to be there."

Then we ought to encourage one another to advance further spiritually. Don't ever bring someone down spiritually. Don't ever discourage someone who wants to advance spiritually. Don't ever do that. Don't ever be a hindrance to someone who wants to grow spiritually. Don't get in their way. If you can't encourage them, get out of the way. We need to strive to advance spiritually. When we do that, the church advances spiritually, and then we are what people need. That's what we want to be. We care nothing about being the church that people want, because what people want has absolutely nothing to do with God. We want to be the church that people need, and therefore we must be spiritually healthy.

Chapter 13

Maintaining a Sense of Necessity

“... so much the more, as ye see the day
approaching.” – Heb 10:25

We live in a time when many churches have the wrong emphasis, aim, and goal. Their objective is to be loved and accepted by the world. When you do that, you have to make some changes and when you do that you cease to become the church that people need and you become the church that people want.

I want to take the thought for this message from Hebrews 10:22-25. *“Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; (for he is faithful that promised;) And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.”*

These verses contain several exhortations, several admonitions. The writer of Hebrews is issuing a call to action, seeking to inspire and to encourage the readers to do something of tremendous importance. The urgings that he mentions here, the exhortations are followed by a phrase, “let us”, which is in the imperative. It is a common phrase throughout the book of Hebrews, being used 12 times in the 13 chapters. This favorite phrase of the writer of Hebrews, “let us”, is of course followed by a call to action.

With these exhortations, the writer is exhorting these people of one of the Lord’s churches to persevere in the faith in the face of trials, temptations, difficulties, dangers, and even heretics. The words “let us” are imperative, which also is expressive of something that is of vital importance, absolutely crucial, essential, indispensable, and very very urgent. At the end of verse 25, he adds a phrase, *“and so much the more as ye see the day approaching.”*

The fact that the end is near, is not a bad thing, not for you and I that are saved. But, that fact adds to the importance of our duties to God. I believe it increases our responsibility and ought to increase our passion. The fact

that the end is near makes our duties to God even more crucial, even more necessary. It adds to the urgency of what we're to be doing. God has called us to do the Lord's business, the Lord's way, for His honor, for His glory. The fact that the end is near makes that even that much more urgent. If we're going to be the church that people need, we must not lose sight of the importance and the urgency of what we're called to do.

I'm afraid many today have lost sight of the importance of what you and I are called to do. They have lost sense of the urgency. God is to be our top priority. The closer we get to the end, even of our individual lives, the more we ought to realize that, "God ought to be my priority." The closer we get to the end before the Lord comes, the more we ought to be aware that God should be number one, that God needs to be our priority, that there are a lot of things that just don't matter, there are a lot of things that just are not important. We ought to be realizing that more and more and more every day. If we're going to be the church that people need, we have to maintain a sense of necessity. That is the subject of this message, maintaining necessity.

Consider first of all, the times in which we live. For a good 20 years, probably more, we have been hearing that almost as an excuse, "Churches are this way because that's the times in which we live." I think a lot of God's people have used it as an excuse not to be what they ought to be, not to do what they ought to do. But, my point is, the times in which we live ought to add to the importance of what we're to do and what we're to be. So the times in which we live should not be a detriment, but instead they ought to be an incentive in our service to the Lord.

We live in the days that are described in 2nd Timothy 3:1-8, "*This know also*", we're to know, we're to be aware of the times in which we live, we're not to be ignorant of what is going on around us, we're not to be ignorant of what is happening, "*that in the last days perilous*", dangerous, "*times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own*

selves”, and everything mentioned in these 8 verses goes back to that phrase, men shall be lovers of them own selves, that's the root of the problem, “*covetous*”, that's why people are covetous, because they're lovers of their own selves, “*boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, Without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, Traitors, heady,*” or rash, “*highminded,*” puffed up, “*lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God; Having a form of godliness,*” that would refer to those that profess salvation, they have a form of godliness, “*but denying the power thereof:*” and then there's some instruction, “*from such turn away. For of this sort are they which creep into houses, and lead captive silly women laden with sins, led away with divers lusts, Ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth.*”, that pretty much describes our society today, “*Now as Jannes and Jambres withstood Moses, so do these also resist the truth: men of corrupt minds, reprobate concerning the faith.*”

Then notice 2nd Timothy 3:13-14, “*But evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse*”, things aren't going to get better, “*deceiving, and being deceived. But*”, in spite of all of these things, “*continue thou in the things which thou hast learned*”. Does it sound like what has been described is a detriment? NO! It's an incentive. You keep on in spite of how bad it is, in spite of the fact that evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse. You as God's people keep on holding on to, “*the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them;*”

Yes, we live in very sinful times. We live in a very rebellious day, a time of hatred and opposition to the very truths of God. Those things are not going to get better. We live in a day when the ungodly, the wicked, are more and more relentless and determined all the time. All the while God's people are becoming less and less determined. Yet, that determination and evil should be an incentive to you and I to be determined in that which is good.

The ungodly are relentless and they are determined to promote their agenda of filthiness, defilement, vileness, wickedness, blasphemy, and heresy. They want you and I and all churches across the United States to accept them as they are. Furthermore, churches want to be loved by these people, so they don't say anything that would call into question the belief system of the ungodly, or make them uncomfortable. A church does that, they've become them. If you become them, you have ceased to be what they need. This is where we are today in the religious world.

These individuals are increasingly more brazen to force their filthy way upon everyone. This is where we get political correctness. It's disgusting, but that's another message. These individuals are very hostile, they are very, very aggressive. We live in days in which there has been a massive infiltration into our homes, into our churches, and into our schools of that which is contrary to God and, sad to say, most of God's people have just rolled over and said, "Well, that's just the way it is. You know it's the days in which we live." These things ought to be an incentive for you and I to do what's right.

We live in days of great spiritual decay. It's sad to say, we live in days when even God's people want to be loved, they want to be accepted. What do you have to be loved and accepted by the world? Well, you're going to have to become them. They begin to walk like the world, they begin to look like the world, they begin to talk like the world, they begin to think like the world. That makes for a very dangerous time, that makes for a very hazardous and very threatening time. Those are the days in which we live.

The fact that we live in the last days is never an excuse for indifference among God's people. It's never an excuse for apathy concerning the Lord's work. It is never an excuse for the lack of interest in spiritual things. It's not an excuse for a lack of enthusiasm for the things of God. It's not an excuse for a lack of concern and a lack of passion for the things of the Lord. It's never an excuse for spiritual

slackness, spiritual coldness, spiritual carelessness, spiritual lingering and hesitating. But rather, the fact that we live in the last days of the last days, and the fact that the coming of the Lord draws nigh, this should be an incentive to you and I to serve the Lord. This should be a motivation for you and I to stand up for the truth. This should be an incentive, a motivation, a stimulus for you and I to stand up and say, "That is wrong! That is sin against God," instead of being so worried about who we are going to offend and who may not come back to the church if we say these things. You better remember why you're here. Why we're here is not to be loved by this world, not to be accepted by the world. We're not promoting that we go out of our way to be hated. But, you do what's right and you will be hated. You do what's right and you're not going to be accepted by most. This should be our provocation. It should provoke us. The days in which we live should provoke us to be more earnest, serious, diligent, dedicated, zealous, and impassioned in the service of the Lord. Don't use the sinful times in which we live as an excuse for spiritual laziness. It should be an incentive.

The fact that we live in such wicked days, increases the urgency for you and I to be what we ought to be, for you and I to do what we ought to do. It increases the sense of urgency for husbands to be men, to be what the Bible tells them to be, for wives and for children to be what the Bible tells them to be. There's an urgency because of the day in which we live. We can not lose that sense of urgency. We can not lose our incentive to serve the Lord.

We can not lose this sense of necessity. We must have an awareness, an understanding, a grasp of the times in which we live. That should cause us to maintain a sense of urgency, a sense of necessity. In 1 st Corinthians 9:16, I realize Paul is talking about preaching, but he says, "*for necessity is laid upon me*", that is "I have to." It's absolutely necessary. There are a lot of things that ought to be absolutely necessary for you and I. Those things ought to

become more and more necessary all the time, because of the day in which we live. This might offend some, but it's truth. I'm afraid that many of God's people and many churches today have become part of the problem rather than the solution. We don't want to ever become part of the problem. If we do that, we cease to be what people need.

The fact that we live in the last days ought to incite us to be what we ought to be and to do what we ought to do. There must be a full realization of the importance and urgency of doing God's business, God's way. God's business can not be done any way you please. It's His business. It must be done God's way, and it must be done for His honor and for His glory. We must never lose sight of the importance and necessity of that. We live in a day when the religious world wants to secularize the things of God. What happens when you secularize the spiritual? They're no longer spiritual, they're now carnal. That's not what people need. People don't need carnality. They've got plenty of that. They need spirituality.

Today, secularizing the things of God is very, very common. Why do people do that? Well, it makes the ungodly feel at ease. It makes them able to go to a church and feel comfortable, happy, entertained, and most importantly, non-threatened. Nothing they believe has been threatened, and they go home happy. But, they haven't heard one thing that they really need. Not one thing.

If we're going to be the church that people need, we must maintain a distinction, we have to be separate from the world. We have to be distinct from the philosophy of the world, from the reasoning of the world, from the ways of the world, from the pursuits of both the secular world and the religions world. There must be a difference. As the world gets more and more wicked, isn't there something wrong when there isn't much of a contrast between God's people and the world? This isn't rocket science. Isn't there something wrong? People are getting more and more wicked and yet the distinction is becoming less and less and less.

What's that tell you? It tells us that God's people are becoming part of the world. It's not our calling to harmonize with the world, to be compatible with the world, whether it be the secular world or the religious world. So much the more as ye see the day approaching.

We must maintain a distinction. Most people don't realize today, but there's a difference between clean and unclean. We had better maintain the distinction. There's a difference today between that which is holy and that which is unholy. It's our responsibility to maintain the distinction and so much the more as ye see the day approaching. "Well everybody's doing it." That's just that much more reason for you not to.

There is a clear distinction between right and wrong. "Well who's to judge between right and wrong?" God has already judged what is right and what is wrong. We don't have to determine what is right and what is wrong. It's already been determined, we just have to stand on the side of right. If you stand on the side of right, you stand also against wrong. That's our responsibility. So much the more as you see the day approaching.

There is a difference today between truth and error, and we are to maintain that difference. "Well, we need to accept everyone's belief." Where do you find that in God's word? There is a distinction between truth and error. Don't you see that there is a difference between the doctrine of God and the doctrines of demons? There's a difference, and we must maintain that difference. If we do not maintain that difference and we do not see the absolute urgency of maintaining that difference, we cease to be what people need.

We can not allow the secular or the religious world to determine and dictate what we believe and what we practice. "Well, Brother Dan, don't you know nobody believes that any more." First of all, that's not true. I agree there's not many, but there are people that believe the truth. We can not allow the world to dictate to us what is true. God has already dictated that.

In a wicked and evil day, when the objective of the religious world, for the most part, is skewed, we must maintain a proper objective. It gets back to, “not ourselves but Christ Jesus the Lord.” It gets discouraging at times, because we live in a day when the majority of people are just dazzled by the world's philosophies, ideas, and ways even though they are in direct contradiction of the word of God. If we're going to be the church that people need, we must maintain a distinction.

We must maintain a proper objective, no matter what the newest trend is. I don't really care what the newest trend is, no matter how popular it might be, who might accept it, and who might approve of it. You and I have a responsibility, and so much the more as we see the day approaching, to maintain a distinction. We must see the necessity of that.

It's just like David when he came upon the scene and there was Saul, Abner, and some great men. They were all cowering before Goliath and David said, “is there not a cause?” Can't you all see that? There's a cause, David said. There's a cause today and it's the cause of God. There is no greater cause in all the world, and we must realize the necessity of the cause. We must realize and have a sense of the urgency and it must be our continual quest to maintain a distinction, so the people will know that there is a difference.

We live in a day of upheaval, of great change. We must maintain a regularity. Earlier in this series of messages, I presented a message, “the same people, in the same place, doing the same thing.” That's what we need to be, week after week after week, year after year after year. We need to maintain a regularity, a steadiness in doing the Lord's business in the Lord's way.

In a day when there are many opposing forces, many opposing bearers and obstacles, in a day when the devil's programs and agendas are becoming more and more accepted even by God's people, and more and more tolerated, somebody needs to stand, to be firm, be a voice of common

sense, be steadfast, resolute, determined, decided for the things of the Lord. Someone needs to be adamant, unwavering, unshakable, and that's you and I. That's what we must be. We must be valiant for the cause of the Lord.

If we're going to be the church that people need, we have got to be a people of backbone, fortitude, resolve, and perseverance. Paul said, "*be ye steadfast*", that is relentless, unchanging, uncompromising. Be "*unmovable*", which means you're unaffected by opposition, obstacles, and that which is popular; "*always*", that simply means no matter what; "*abounding*", being plentiful, being fruitful; "*in the work of the Lord.*" Then he added, "*and so much the more as ye see the day approaching.*" Yes, we're to be steadfast, and so much the more as ye see the day approaching.

God has absolutes. People want to do away with the absolutes of a holy God. You know why they want to do that? It so they can do what they want to do, because they're lovers of themselves. In a day when people want to do away with the absolutes of a holy God and want nothing to do with the God of the Bible, they invent a God that they can accept in their minds, a God that will let them live as they please, do as they please, and think as they please. In a day when the world does not tolerate biblical convictions, we need a strict adherence to, a strict compliance with the word of God, and so much the more as ye see the day approaching. We need to act in accordance with the word of God. We need to take seriously that the Bible is our only rule of faith and practice. Every church says that, but very few practice it. We need to be the church that people need.

We need to be a people who grasp, who hold unto, who lay hold of that which is good. 1st Thessalonians 5:21, says, "... *hold fast that which is good.*" That means there are some things that aren't good. Let them go. Speaking of the spiritual, you get something that's good, you hold unto it. You don't let anything get in the way. Revelation 3:2, says hold fast the things "which remain". Churches have lost

much, but you better hold on to what you have left, and so much the more as you see the day approaching.

You see you and I must continue on, we must keep on, we must persist, we must press on. We do so for many reasons. First of all, for the Lord. Also for the sake of the church, for the sake of future generations, but first and foremost it's for the Lord. Somebody needs to stand for the truth for these little ones, for future generations, that they will know what the truth is. Someone needs to stand for the sake of the truth and someone needs to stand for the Lord's glory and so much the more as ye see the day approaching.

This world is a mixed up place. I feel less and less at home in this world all the time. I feel like an alien. You go to the mall, it's sickening. I mean, it's about all I can take. It tests my patients. "Well you need to be more loving, you need to be more accepting." Well, you pray for me in that then. This world is a mixed up place, filled with that which is vile. I don't want to ever accept that which is vile. It's filled with that which is retched. It's filled with people who have been deceived, and who are pursuing earnestly and clinging to that which will not work. They pursue these things. You and I, we have the solution. The word of God has the solution, the answer, and the remedy. Don't water it down. This is what they need. Is it what they want? No. But it is what they need. We must, and so much the more as we see the day approaching, share the truth and communicate truth to those that so desperately need it. "Well they don't want to hear it." Tell them anyway. They may not want to hear it, but they need to hear it, and they need to be told.

If we're going to be the church that people need, our love for the Lord must be fervent. Our love for the Lord must be intense, without reservation, and uninhibited. So much the more as ye see the day approaching. Our love for the Lord ought to fill us with excitement, with enthusiasm for the Lord, ought to have a strong drawing effect upon our hearts, and ought to cause us to be attracted to the Lord and the things of the Lord and less and less and less attracted to

the things of this world. So much the more as ye see the day approaching. Our love for the Lord ought to cause us to love the Lord's house, the Lord's day, the Lord's people, and so much the more as ye see the day approaching.

If we're going to be the church that people need, we need to be a people of prayer. We've already preached on these things. We need to be a people committed to praying for lives to be changed. And so much the more as you see the day approaching. We ought to be a people committed to praying for God to give us showers of blessing, so much the more as ye see the day approaching. We ought to be praying for moms and dads, and so much the more as ye see the day approaching. We ought to be praying for young children and teens and young adults and so much the more as ye see the day approaching. We ought to be praying for husbands and wives for marriages and homes and so much the more as ye see the day approaching. I personally do not see, as far being widespread, that God's people are praying more. I believe they're praying less and less all the time. They have less time to do so, because they fill up their days with the world. There's only so much time in a day. You buy all the world's toys, and I assume that you buy them to use them. There's only so much time. When are you going to use them? Usually the Lord's day. So much the more as we see the day approaching we need to be a people of prayer. We need to be a people that prays that God would give us the ability to be what we ought to be, to do what we ought to do, that God would give us the burden and the power to be what we ought to be and to do what we ought to do.

If we're going to be the church that people need, we need to seek to excel spiritually, and so much the more as ye see the day approaching. We ought to always be striving, to always be moving forward spiritually, always striving to be spiritually increasing and developing and advancing, and so much the more as ye see the day approaching. We ought to feel that these things are necessary. We ought to feel with

Paul, necessity is laid upon me, I've got to do this, I can't do anything else. This is urgent. That needs to be our attitude.

So many times things of God are put way, way back and we'll get to them if we have time. The end is coming. None of us know when we're going to die, but some of us can do the math. You don't have much longer. What are you waiting for? All through my ministry, I've heard people say, "Well I will one day." Now they're getting pretty close to the end and they still haven't. God help us, and so much the more as ye see the day approaching.

If we're going to be the church that people need, we must be a people that worship the Lord, who find the house of worship to be a very beautiful place, to be a very fascinating place, a very interesting and desirable place, and so much the more as ye see the day approaching.

The times in which we live are not an excuse for indifference, apathy, and they should not be a detriment to the Lord's work. Rather they ought to be an incentive for you and I to be more diligent, more dedicated, more zealous, more impassioned, in the Lord's work. The times in which we live, I believe, serve to manifest the importance, the urgency, and the necessity of the Lord's work. We've gone too far to quit now, and it just wouldn't make sense. There is an urgency about the Lord's work, and we need to be doing it God's way, for His honor, for His glory. Each and every passing day, in the times in which we live, ought to cause us to feel, "I've got to live for the Lord today, cause I don't have much time left, I've got to live for the Lord today because it's so very important. I've got to advance further spiritually today. I've got to go a little further than I was yesterday, because it's so very important, because this world is a mixed up place." This world is a terrible place. It's a sinful place.

The Lord has kept us here to do His work, not our own bidding. God has not left you here so you can have a good time. That's not what it's about. It's about Him. That ought to be a good time for us, just serving the Lord, just serving Him. Oh, that we would feel an urgency.

Look around at the little ones. Don't you see there's a cause to stand? You might be the only one who stands, but somebody has got to stand, so stand. Stand for the cause of Christ. That's the only way that we can be the church that people need. "Well if we do all of those things, the world will think we're nuts." There's something wrong with you if the world doesn't think you're nuts. It means that you have given in to them, you've become them. You can't be what they need, if you're just like them.

Chapter 14

There Must Be Unity

“... how good ... [it is] for brethren to
dwell together in unity!”
– Psalm 133:1

THERE MUST BE UNITY

In Psalm 133:1, it says, “*Behold, how good*”, or beautiful and bountiful, “*and how pleasant*”, or enjoyable, “*it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!*” In order to be the church that people need, as we've stressed throughout the series, it must be our purpose, it must be our determination, our intention, our objective to do the Lord's business, the Lord's way, for His Honor, and for His glory. That should be our aspiration, that should be our quest. In this quest there must be unity. I'm not just talking about unity in a business meeting and being pleasant with one another, either. The unity I'm talking about is a unity of objective to do the Lord's work, the Lord's way, which is far, far more important than whether we agree on what to do with the lawn, or what to do with this or that. That is why we can not allow people to become members who are not in unity with the objective of doing the Lord's work, the Lord's way, for His honor, and for His glory.

Unity of purpose is absolutely essential to the well being of a business, the well being of a home, and certainly to the well being of a church. It is absolutely essential to the effectiveness of a New Testament Baptist church. By this unity, we mean that there must be harmony, there must be accord, there must be uniformity in doing the Lord's work the Lord's way. It must be a joint effort. There must be a partnership, a solidarity among the members of Home Baptist Church concerning the objective, concerning what it is that we are here for.

In this message I want to cover that if we're going to be the church that people need, there must be a shared purpose, we must have the same purpose. I believe that there are times when a church can agree on how things ought to be done as far as maintenance or who to have for a revival or whatever and still not be in unity. There has to be a unity of purpose. There has to be a unity in what it is that we are working toward. We want to look at this unity.

The New Testament has much to say about unity, which is described in the New Testament. In Acts 4:32, the

writer is talking about the church, *“And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul:”* The unity that we're interested in is unity of purpose, we're all moving in the same direction spiritually. It is described as being of one heart, one soul. A multiplicity of people that are one. Certainly, a unity of heart includes, that we're compassionate to one another, have sympathy for one another, affections toward one another. But, it's much more than that. It is being of one heart, one soul, striving to reach one particular objective, doing the Lord's work, the Lord's way.

It is also described as being of the same mind. In Romans 12:16, Paul says, *“Be of the same mind one toward another.”* He describes this as being like minded later on in Romans 15:5 and 6, *“Now the God of patience and consolation grant you to be like minded one toward another according to Christ Jesus: That ye may with one mind and one mouth”*, a multiplicity of people having one mind, having one mouth, thinking the same way. I don't care if we differ on whether the grass should be 2 inches long or 3 inches long. I don't care. But, when it comes to the faith, when it comes to doing the Lord's business, the Lord's way, we need to be one mind, we need to all speak the same thing. One mind, one mouth, glorifying the Lord. In 2nd Corinthians 13:11, *“Finally, brethren, farewell. Be perfect,”*, be mature, be sincere, *“be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace;”* and I believe being of one mind will result in living in peace, *“and the God of love and peace shall be with you.”* That is, be of one mind in the right thing and God will bless that. He always does.

Philippians 2:2, *“Fulfil ye my joy, that ye be likeminded”*. The Bible also speaks of those in Philippians 3:15, who are otherwise minded. Those who are otherwise minded are the ones you have to look out for, the ones you have to watch. Again, I'm not talking about petty things that really don't matter. I'm talking about things that do matter, the things that we're here for, doing the Lord's work. Watch those who are otherwise minded.

Watch those who have a different objective. That's why you can not have members come in and set the terms, because we already have an objective. You're either on board with that objective or you're not. If you're not on board with that objective, you need to go somewhere where you can be on board with their objective or whatever your objective might be.

1st Peter 3:8. *“Finally, be ye all of one mind”*. There it is again, *one mind*, we're to think alike. I keep reminding you, we're talking about doing the Lord's work, the Lord's way. We're to be of one mind when it comes to spiritual things.

We see also this unity is described as being perfectly joined together in mind and in judgment. 1st Corinthians 1:10, says, *“Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but”*, that is rather than there being divisions, *“that ye be perfectly”*, or absolutely, completely, entirely, and totally, *“joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.”* A church is in great danger when they can not agree on disciplinary matters, doctrinal matters, in the direction that we ought to be going. That church is in trouble. That church is in danger of ceasing to be what people need if they already haven't. We must be perfectly joined together in mind and in judgment.

We should all be perfectly joined together in thinking. It is not our goal to please and entertain the ungodly, to get as many members as we can possibly get. Our goal is to be pure and to do the Lord's work, the Lord's way. We need to be perfectly joined together in that. We can vote to buy a refrigerator and some one may want to buy one size and some may want to buy the other. That's not what I'm talking about. I'm talking about a unity that's far, far greater than that, far, far more important. The truth is we can disagree on the size of a refrigerator we should buy and still be the church that we ought to be. But, you can't disagree on the objective, you can't disagree on the purpose and continue to

be the church that people need. This unity is to be perfectly joined together.

It is also described as living in peace. In 2nd Corinthians 13:11, 1st Thessalonians 5:13, say live in peace with one another. It is also described as a unity of the spirit and the bond of peace. In Ephesians 4:3. "*Endeavouring*", that speaks of earnest and industrious effort, "*to keep*", to keep is to guard, it implies that you already have it. Paul here, is talking to a church that's not experiencing division, he's talking to a church that has unity. He says you need to endeavor, you need to be earnest to guard the unity that you have. If you're thinking the same thing, you're of the same mind, you're all moving in the same direction spiritually, you all have the same goal of doing God's work, God's way, for His honor, and for His glory. You need to guard that unity. You must not let anything come in that would weaken that unity in any way. "So and so wants to join the church but they don't believe in singing the songs that we sing." You better beware. "They don't believe what we preach." You better beware. It's not worth it. "Well they have a large family, it would really add to our membership." It's not worth it. They are joining us, and we already know what direction we're going and they must be in unity. They must be in unity with our objective, which again is to do God's work.

Paul says to this church who had unity that they needed to work very hard to guard it. We need to work hard to guard the unity we have. If you let down, you will soon allow people in that are not in unity. You need to guard against that. You need to watch. Romans 16, says you watch those who cause divisions. You'd better watch them, and if they continue to do so, you had better do something about it, because you must keep, you must keep unity.

Paul says, you endeavor to keep the unity of the spirit. It is the unity that the Holy Spirit has produced. God the Holy Spirit is our teacher and He teaches us the same things and He causes us to be in agreement. You endeavor

and you work very earnestly to keep that unity that the Spirit of God has produced. This is in the bond of peace. We're talking about a relationship we have with one another. We have a tie, a link. God has added us to the same body. That means that those whom God has added, God has linked us together. We must guard to keep that unity. The bond of peace speaks of friendship, fellowship, partnership, association, and attachment to one another. It's the Holy Spirit that has produced all of this. This is more than being kind to one another. Certainly, it's all included, but it's much more important than that. It's much more important than whether or not we should send \$1,000 or \$1,200 to a missionary. This unity of objective is something far more important than that. We can not be the church that people need if you have a membership that's moving in all different directions. It's not possible. We must all be moving in the same direction. I don't have a problem with people voting against matters that are not spiritual. They don't believe that we should spend "x" amount of dollars on such and such; I don't have a problem with them voting against that; you can vote against it. However, once the church has decided, I do have a problem if they continue and take on a crusade about it; now we've got a problem.

I do have a problem when people vote against spiritual things; when it is a spiritual matter moving in a direction toward Christ. I have a real problem with what most people do today when they would really vote against something, they abstain. In other words, "I'm against it but I don't have the backbone to tell you." You're either for it or against it, and when it comes to spiritual matters, we need to be moving in the same direction.

We see also this unity is described as one body and the whole body. This is very important. 1st Corinthians 12:12, "*For as the body*", the human body, "*is one, and hath many members*", I have 2 arms, I have 2 legs, 2 eyes, 2 ears, but I'm one body, you cut this body in half, it ceases to be one body, for as the physical body is one and hath many

members, *“and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ”*, or so also is the body of Christ, *“For by one Spirit are we”*, that is the body, the local body of Christ, *“all baptized into one body”*, it not 2 bodies, it's one body, one body with the same objective. Verse 20, *“But now are they many members, yet but one body.”* One body. Ephesians 4:4, *“There is one body”*, it's talking about the local congregation, *“and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling;”* Verse 16, *“From whom the whole body”*. We're to operate as one body, as a whole. That which is whole is complete. We are to operate as a complete body. That is everybody that is in that body, is on the same page, moving in the same direction at least wanting to go in the same direction. There are not 5 or 6 different spiritual objectives. There is one and that is to do the Lord's work, the Lord's way, for His honor, and for His glory.

So we're one body. “One” speaks of the unit, speaks of a combining. We're to be a whole body. That means we're to be intact, unbroken. Someone gets angry because another person has been disciplined and removed from the membership of church. Someone gets angry because of a truth that has been preached and they stay out of the church. You're now no longer operating as a whole body. You've got a problem, and it is a problem that must be addressed. One body, a whole body. Home Baptist Church is to be one body. Home Baptist Church is to be a whole body. It applies to all things, but we're talking about the most important thing of all, spiritual matters.

This unity is also described as being tempered, framed, and joined together. Again, notice 1st Corinthians 12:24, he's comparing a physical body to the church as a body, and he says, *“For our comely parts have no need: but God hath tempered”*, that is, God has harmonized and God has proportioned, *“the body together”*. When God adds to a church, He does so in a way that produces harmony. I don't believe the Lord is going to add anybody that is going to take

away. He adds those who are truly an addition. There is a harmony, there is a proportioning. The Lord knows what we need. Believe it or not, the Lord knows what kind of church members you need and when God adds, He proportions together just what we need. This is the unity that we're talking about. God hath tempered or mingled, harmonized, and proportioned the body together. That word together speaks of unity.

In Ephesians 2:21, *"In whom all the building fitly"*, harmoniously, *"framed"*, which means bound and welded, *"together"*. This is how God adds. We are fitly framed, bounded and welded together, and when this happens, it *"groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord:"*. Paul puts it this way in Ephesians 4:16, *"From whom the whole body fitly joined"*, when it's fitly joined, it's organized. God doesn't create a mess. God does everything in order, and if a church is in a mess, that's not God's doing, it is *"fitly"*, framed, bound and welded together, *"fitly joined"*, or organized, *"together and compacted"*, that is pressed firmly together. God wanted a His church in Mount Morris, Michigan, and God has added to that church. What He has done, He has brought people from various backgrounds, people from various parts of the country, and He has organized them together and we're to keep that unity.

He has compacted, pressed them firmly together. Why did he do that? So that we could decide what size refrigerator we need? No, I don't think so. He did that so his work would be done in His way in Mount Morris, Michigan. Each one that God has added, He's compacted them together. Now it is our responsibility to endeavor to keep and to guard that unity. We can not allow anything to weaken that unity. We can not allow an individual, a family, or anything to threaten that unity of purpose, that objective.

Paul talks about this unity as being in one spirit, one mind striving together. Philippians 1:27, says *"Only let your conversation be as it becometh the gospel of Christ: that whether I come and see you, or else be absent, I may hear of*

your affairs, that ye stand fast”, that you stand firm, that you stand unmovable. “Well I think we ought to buy red carpet and I'm not moving from that.” That's not what he's talking about. “I think we ought to have pork at the conference rather than whatever else and I'm not moving.” That's not what he's talking about. He's talking about spiritual things. He's talking about unity of doctrine, purpose, and objective, *that ye stand fast*. That ye do so in one spirit, one attitude, and one frame of mind. We are here to do God's business, God's way, for His honor, and for His glory, and we're going to stand fast in that, and we are of one attitude and one frame of mind. When somebody comes along and says, “Oh I don't think we ought to do it that way.” The whole church stands fast and says, “This is the way we're doing it, and if you don't like it, you can go somewhere else.”

We're stand in one attitude, one frame of mind, with one judgment, striving together. That speaks of an effort. Striving together, not separately, striving together for the faith of the gospel, for the truth of the gospel. We must guard that unity. There are all kinds of wolves and every now and then, a wolf will creep in. Every now and then a false teacher might creep in, but they'll manifest themselves, they always do. And when they do, you must take action. You must. “Oh that's unkind, we need to teach them.” You need to take action, because it is our duty to guard this unity.

The “wolves” all work the same way. I've never seen them work differently. They have the knack, the ability, the talent of finding the weakest member in the church. I'm talking spiritually. They'll pull them to the side and they'll begin to pay them compliments and, oh they'll begin to build them up. Then they'll begin to tell them, “You're not appreciated, you're not appreciated by this church.” Then they'll begin to tell them what they think, and they've got them. Then they'll go to the next one and as soon as you see that happening, the church needs to stand fast and put a stop to it, because it will spread. In every church, there are sheep, there are mature sheep and immature sheep. We have a

responsibility to protect the immature sheep. We have a responsibility to watch over them and to protect them from the wolves. This is all part of guarding this unity.

There must be a joint effort, a joint cooperation, an effort of partnership, an effort of working in tandem, working side by side, shoulder to shoulder, hand in hand, toward that one goal, doing the Lord's work, the Lords' way, for His honor and glory. Yes we may disagree on what color the hymn books should be, we may disagree on what color the pews should be, what color the carpet should be, what kind of piano we should buy, what kind of organ we should buy, what kind of pulpit we should have, but you can not disagree on the objective and truth.

Hopefully, when you disagree, somebody doesn't go, "I want blue. I want green." Hopefully people realize, "You know, we all have the same objective, and that is to do God's work God's way, and I don't care if the hymn books are red or blue." It doesn't matter because it has nothing to do with doing the Lord's work. We need to realize that when we have differences of opinion on some things, we need to realize, "You know what, that really isn't all that important, and I need and I realize that this brother over here or this sister over here, though they may think it should be done a different way, I think we should buy something else, a different model, we're still working toward that same objective, and we're not going to let anything weaken that unity."

This unity is described as being of one accord. Philippians 2:2, says, "*Fulfil ye my joy, that ye be likeminded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind.*" That speaks of agreement, speaks of concurrence, compatibility, being of one accord. The goal is not to appease the ungodly, to make them feel comfortable, to make them feel non-threatened. The goal is doing the Lord's work, that's the goal. And we must be of one accord, if we're going to continue to be the church that people need, we must be of one accord in these things that matter.

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Philippians 3:16 describes this unity as walking by the same rule. Our rule of faith and practice is the word of God and we must all walk by the same rule. “Yes I know what the Bible says, but...”. We must walk by the same rule, the word of God.

Let's look at the characteristics of this unity. We're told in our text in Psalm 133:1, it is good. That is, it's an excellent thing. It's a very acceptable thing, to be in unity concerning the Lord's work. It's the right thing. It's a good thing, it's an admirable thing. It's said that it's good and pleasant, that is, that it's enjoyable.

After 5 years, when I went to Faith in Streamwood, the first couple of years there, every single message preached was challenged by someone. Every single week. It didn't matter what I preached, someone wanted to argue. Someone wanted to challenge. I learned very, very quickly that before I preach, I'm going to know what I'm talking about. I'm going to be able to confront all of their objections. You know what, when you don't have that unity, it's not very enjoyable. It's not an enjoyable thing to come to church when there is division over doctrine. For the most part, I love preaching, I enjoy preaching. But back then, I couldn't hardly stand it. I dreaded it because I knew that afterward there was going to be an argument, there was going to be a challenge. But with unity, when we're all on the same page, spiritually, that's enjoyable. It's a very satisfying thing. It's a very pleasing thing.

You know I've learned through the years that I can disagree with somebody over money or what color the hymn books should be, but as long as we're in unity of purpose, that's really what matters. You can overlook a lot of things by just realizing, “You know what, we're on the same page. We're moving in the same direction.” I believe that for the most part that is true of Home Baptist Church. We have the same objective. I'll be honest, there are some I'm not so sure about. But for the most part, we have the same objective spiritually. We must guard that unity.

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He also says in Psalm 133:2, that this unity, “... *is like the precious ointment ...*”. He's talking about oil. The nature of this oil is to heal that which is wounded. Unity has the ability to heal that which is wounded. Somebody can say something that hurts your feelings, but when you realize, “You know what, we're on the same page, we're striving for the same things, in the long run.” That has a healing effect. It heals wounds. People who get their feelings hurt and then don't darken the door of the church for 6 months, I seriously question their objective. I believe their objective is themselves and not doing the Lord's work, the Lord's way.

Also the nature of oil is to soften that which is hard. I tell you what, it's pretty hard to have hardness of heart toward a brother or sister in Christ when you're moving in the same direction, when you have the same objective. It's pretty hard.

This unity is for the good of the people of God. Jeremiah 32:39, “*And I will give them one heart, and one way, that they may fear me for ever*”, then notice what it says, “*for the good of them*”, for their own good, “*and of their children after them.*” You know what happens to children that grow up in a church where there's constant fighting over spiritual matters? They either leave the church or they become just like that. God help us. Unity is for the good of the people.

Unlike division within the church, unity gives liberty to the preaching of the word. When there is division of doctrine, when there is division of spiritual objective, people are not going to learn as much as they could. Remember Paul said to the church of Corinth, I wanted to speak to you about spiritual things, but you're not able to handle it because of the divisions. And when a pastor has to address all the issues that's going on all of the time, it really takes away from the teaching of the word of God, and it becomes destructive. But unity, unlike division, enables people to properly hear the preaching of the word, which is to their own spiritual benefit. Ephesians 4:12 and 13, say that this

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unity is edifying to the church. If we're going to be the church that people need, there must be unity.

There must be a unity of burden. We must have the same burden, and that is to please God, to do everything for His honor and His glory. There must be a unity of purpose. When there is a unity of burden when there is a unity of purpose, there will also be a unity of priority. We have the same priority to honor and glorify the Lord.

And there's a unity that makes us ready to do whatever it is that God would have us to do. It's a unity of devotion, and it's a unity of steadfastness. Endeavoring to keep the unity of the spirit. This is absolutely necessary if we are going to continue to be the church that people need. Every now and then something will come up to manifest a wrong heart in someone. Every now and then trouble will creep in. And in all those times, what is most important is that the church stands for the truth, that you just stand together no matter how difficult it is, no matter how trying it might be, no matter how many people leave. This is where we stand. People need to know that. Everybody that desires to be a member of Home Baptist Church needs to know this is where we stand, and if you're going to join with us, this is where you stand also. There must be unity, there must be agreement. God help us to continue to be the church that people need.