

The Wisdom of Christ in Granting the Means to Achieve God's Great Purpose....p.2

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1 Timothy 3, let's go back there this morning as we do part 2 of honoring the excellency of Jesus Christ, the excellence of his wisdom in granting the means to achieve his greatest or highest purpose, that is, his own glory, and he's ordained that the centerpiece of his purposes and his glory is the local church. We talked about how there were the preliminaries, the great glory that God brought to himself through the nation of Israel and even through Israel's foes, many other things, but that was something of the central theme of God's purposes for his own glory in the old dispensation, but all of that great glory from the Old Testament pointed to the greater glory of God's work through his church, and we're using 1 Timothy 3 as a foundation. We're gonna get back to it this morning and wrap this thing up, Lord willing, but Paul writing to the church or writing to Timothy who's actually functioning as pastor of the church at Ephesus, now this is a church Paul knew a lot about. He spent a lot of time there so obviously he could write a lot about a lot of specific needs and things they need to address. So as we look at Timothy, though, it is a blueprint for the local church. We keep in mind that it's not the whole blueprint, we need the whole of the New Testament, really the whole of the Scriptures but the whole of the New Testament to glean, let's say, the structures and the means of church life but we gain great wisdom on practical things for the church from Paul's letter to Timothy.

1 Timothy 3:15 and 16. He says, "Timothy,

15 but in case I am delayed, I write so that you will know how one ought to conduct himself in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth. 16 By common confession, great is the mystery of godliness: He who was revealed in the flesh, Was vindicated in the Spirit, Seen by angels, Proclaimed among the nations, Believed on in the world, Taken up in glory.

Let me start with III in our overall outline, the biblical means of grace. The biblical means of grace. I I I I've thought about this, studied on it, read about it, um, since my conversion, I guess, off and on, and Ephesians 3:10 is a good cross-reference here I'd like to throw out. In Ephesians 3:10, Paul writes to the church at Ephesus and says, "in order that the wisdom, the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the church to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places." Now he doesn't say through

Christ. Obviously it's through Christ. The church is only what she is because she is his prized purchase. She is his body. She is a reflection of his wisdom, his power and his work, but notice how it centers in the church. And again, guys, don't take your minds off to the universal church all the time, this includes the local ekklesias, the local ekklesia is that place, that instrument through which God wants his manifold wisdom to go forth.

Well, if your church and my local church is going to be the kind of church where God can show forth his glory, where God can display his wisdom, we need to function according to biblical means. In wisdom, God's granted all that's needed for him to have or for our churches to be a true assembly, a true church. You could start as far as he's granted his Son Jesus Christ who is the cornerstone, who purchased the church with his own blood. He's granted to us the Holy Spirit with and I want to say a lot about the Holy Spirit as we continue on in this message because you can dot every "i" and cross every "t" theologically and organizationally and methodologically in the local church and be a complete failure. The power of the Holy Spirit is absolutely critical. I've walked in some of that. I am a strategist. I am an organizer. I am a visionary and I can do it all without God but it falls flat, and God in his grace taught me and is teaching me that lesson.

He's granted us his word. Brothers, this word is self-evident is the wisdom of Christ. We see the excellency of Jesus Christ for his children and, quite frankly if you read through the Bible you'll notice it's always, almost always addressed to local churches. This book is a local church book. Even writing to Timothy, he's writing to the end of the benefit of the local church. You just can't hardly emphasize the church too much because it, everything about the true church exalts the true Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Of course, it gives us the ordinances for the church, spiritual gifts to function in the church, and I like to view these as something of a complimentarianism. Christ gives these things, he ordained these means, he must empower these means, yet we are to carry them out. We work in concert with God. We ah, ah, ah, we have to administer the ordinances. We preach Christ. We teach and preach the word and on and on we could go.

Talking about these means in a in an overall fashion, I guess historically speaking most of the time when a systematic theologian or whoever talks about the means of grace, typically they would talk about the preaching of the word and the ordinance of baptism and the ordinance of the Lord's supper. Charles Hodge adds to that prayer would be one of the means of grace in the local church. Grudem in his "Systematic Theology" lists 11 of them: teaching the word, baptism, Lord's Supper, prayer, worship, church discipline, giving, spiritual gifts, fellowship, evangelism, ministry to individuals. I might even add to that missions but I'm sure Grudem includes missions under evangelism.

So my point is all these are valid. They're very thoroughly biblical as the means God has ordained but I want to go to IV now, the structures of grace. God has given in his word, if not direct commandments at least thorough example of structures we use in the local church through which the means of grace are exercised or from which the means of grace flow out of. My question to a lot of folks would be all of these means of grace we previously talked about are certainly biblical and legitimate, even essential for healthy church life, but are we left with no divine means from which to exercise them or about

how we are to exercise them. I think we need more uniformity in our fellowships of churches one to another, that we agree on some maybe rather broad but in some sense rather defined structures for the means of grace to be carried out within our churches, because if you have no structure in your church, it's a little bit like saying, well, we have the fundamentals of football, you need a coach, you need a quarterback, you need linemen, etc. etc., you need to block and tackle, etc. but how does that work? Well, you've got to organize an offense. The quarterbacks basically hand the ball off and throw the ball and the running back especially run the ball, sometimes catch the ball. The linemen block for the quarterback and the running backs. The wide receivers primarily catch the ball and the defense, the linemen primarily stop the run and rush the passer, and the linebackers do both, and then the safety and the quarterbacks more or less cover the receiver. When you get it structured, then the blocking and tackling etc. make some sense. These all can function well.

There's a structure from which to function and and and I think that God has given to the church from his the balance of Scripture, not just 1 Timothy though 1 Timothy gives us wonderful and essential structures like elders, deacons, etc. but overall there are structures God has ordained that let's us do our blocking and tackling and running and catching in an effective way to achieve the ends of what the church is to be about. I would say, you know, I have 35 years or so of wrestling with this. It wasn't long after I was converted that I looked at the local church I was attending and I thought, "This is a mess. It's just a mess. Ah, they don't keep up with anybody. They don't know the condition of the flock. The church is filled with people who obviously do not look regenerate." Um, in my little hometown, Lawrenceburg, TN, in the church I was attending, by the way, there were some good and godly men and women of God there so let's be balanced, but there were, I mean, sitting in the church I could count the people I knew in that small town that had left their spouse and gotten them another one, and sometimes both spouses with their new spouses were in the same church. I said, "This is a mess," and part of the reason that it was a mess was not just because they didn't exercise the means of church discipline, it's because they had no structure from which to effectively care for, administer the means of grace in the flock.

And so my heart began to peruse the Scriptures and study and work on things and it wasn't too long after that that I went to one of the first Purpose Driven Church seminars. Talk about a waste of time. I went to the, Brother David, I was just looking for somebody to tell us how can you structure a church and he was the guy telling everybody, "Here's how it's done." So we go to this conference on the Purpose Driven Church. Y'all use his book in the seminary, don't you, Brother David? Now he's laughing. Make sure you're with me, brother. I knew he was. But anyway, we sat in this seminar and Rick Warren comes out and he begins to thunder the grand and glorious new revelation from God that if we want to build Christ's church, we're gonna have to stop talking about sin. Leave out the doctrine of sin, don't trouble people. They know they're sinners. That's just gonna run people off.

We stayed through about 1 ½ sessions, I cleaned up my whole staff and we left but I did come home thinking but there is something to the church being well-organized and

functioning because I don't see much of that in the churches I was involved in, but I thought can we not go to Scripture and just from Scripture develop some structures, which is what I call, I've never seen this phrase anywhere, it may be used a lot, but I call them the structures of grace out of which flow those specific means of grace. I believe if you take a systematic understanding of the teaching of Scriptures, primarily the New Testament but these are taught in the Old Testament also, then you will find these structures that we have embraced here at Grace Life Church and have been walking in for over three decades now, and God has chosen to I think bless them wonderfully. If you think when you see the army of this church family put this conference together, I hope that you notice they're more than just machines doing a job, they love the church. They love their Christ. They joy in it and I think part of that is because we've shown them from Scripture how we can function together as a team, as an army, to carry God's cause forth in this local church, but I think without the structures, we could not put on this conference.

For example, it's the small group structure and the functioning of small groups which greatly facilitates everything else we do here and it enables me to, ah, call up the army quickly and effectively because there are elders who oversee divisions and within the divisions there are faithful under-shepherds under the under-shepherds of elders who oversee the small groups. We have about 70 of them and it it just helps a church to function effectively. I will tell you this, it's a lot of long long long hard work to where you can say far from perfect but we have a decently mature, spiritually and scripturally sound, functioning small group ministry.

Ah, Baptists used to work hard at Sunday school which is the same idea, a lot of them were weak, I understand that, a lot of them were unsound, but I don't know why we threw out the concept of Sunday school. Take something that's built in and make it godly. Don't throw out the baby with the bathwater. I saw all these churches abandoning Sunday school and going to cell groups and going to community groups and they go from 80 or 90% of their worship attendance in Sunday school to about 30 to 40% in their cell groups. That's not a church. A church has to have body life and we're gonna talk a little bit more about that. I'm getting ahead of myself.

But let me, let me say this to ya. The Bible tells us in 1 Peter 5:2 that we're to shepherd the flock of God according to the will of God. We're to shepherd the flock of God according to cultural trends and demographic, ah, ah, peculiarities. No, we're to shepherd the flock of God according to the will of God. God has got a the guidelines, the instructions, the truths for how he wants his church to function. I believe if we are lax in organizing the structures of grace, we will be deficient in carrying out the means of grace.

Now, I I'm gonna put up on here a wheel illustration and, ah, actually it looks just like a steering wheel. I didn't really mean for that to be the case but it does look like a steering wheel. Um, and this falls short and I would not be exaggerating in telling you I've wrestled with this wheel for 30 years and it's the best I've come up with, even though there are limitations. If you ever notice when you take a spiritual truth, you just can't

make it fit a temporal physical illustration? You can do pretty good, so this is pretty good, I think.

The center of the wheel is the core, it's the core structure, if you will, of grace the church is to function from and that's the preaching of the word in congregational worship. Can I say to you, brothers, if that one is not sound, nothing else matters. That has to be right and, ah, sometimes young preachers says, "How how do you oversee 50 plants and mission points and then you have other pastors you're trying to encourage and mentor and then you pastor this local church?" I can tell you how, because for the first 20 years of my ministry, I preached all the time about my role is to study and lead, preach and lead the church and others must do a lot of these other ministries, and after about 600 people got mad and left, they finally got it, and that's just, I'm not exaggerating, I'm not being funny. That was literally sort of the pilgrimage we went through. A lot of people couldn't handle that. They had to have a pastor who was 24/7 on call or he didn't love us. Well, I'm sorry, I do love you but I love you enough to do for you what God's commanded me to do for you. I want you to be to love and to be dependent on the Christ my preaching reveals, not on me, the preacher.

Saying all that to say, brothers, can I say it again? If that's not sound, nothing else matters and that takes a lot of energy. We went through seasons here where I was so weak and beat up from the warfare literally and and I'm not exaggerating, literally and I I think it would be an honest evaluation to say I can do the work of two or three men. I'm just geared that way. But I was so weak all the energy I had was to crawl up into this pulpit and preach twice a week, had to let everything else go and I'd just I'd go unto the Lord and say, "Lord, You know how difficult this is and You know how weak I am in this season. I just don't know if I can go on." And it's almost as if God spoke to me. You say, "Well, did he speak audibly?" And I think it's the like guy said, "No, it was louder than that." It's like God said, "Well, what one thing must you do?" And I said, "Preach the word." And that's what I did in those seasons, just got up and preached, went home and laid on the floor, sometimes I cried, sometimes I did whatever, but just kept preaching.

That one has to be right. The next structure that we have gleaned from a systematic study of the word of God is every member ministry through small groups. Now that's that right hand spoke. Every member ministry through small groups. Now you will never perfectly achieve that but you've got to fight there, and I would say after you pulpit's right because, by the way, from your pulpit the Holy Spirit of God will use the preaching of the word of God to so sanctify leaders in your church with a special Gospel humility so they will be effective small group leaders without having a proud and independent spirit and leaving leading their small groups to be a problem in the church. You've got 70 small groups, if they're not on board, you've got problems but it's the pulpit whereby God uses his truth to break their hearts to humble them and make them grateful they get to be a part of God's church and that makes a good small group leader.

I had I had a guy in Indian, they had about 90 church planters and I was supposed to be teaching them and we ended up having to drop our association because they were so rank Arminian. They were literally going out in villages telling everybody to pray a prayer and

they'd call them all Christians and all those dear folks did out in those villages was add Jesus to the other 70 gods they worshiped in Hinduism, and so we eventually dropped them. But one of the guys stood up and he said, "This small group think won't work." And I said, "What do you mean it won't work?" I said, "It's a biblical principle." And he said, "We go out here, we preach and these people pray to receive Christ and, uh, and then we find key men and we put them over small groups and then we come back two or three months later and all those men have started their own movements with their small group." And I said, "The principle of small groups was not the error, it's the principle of qualified leadership in the small groups is where you had your error."

And so Brother David Young has done a great job because he's a product, he started in a small group, he started teaching a small group, he led a department, a division over small groups, he became a part-time small group ministries coordinator, now he is the full-time small group ministries coordinator. He's a product of the whole thing and he helps me and does a wonderful job in making sure the men and the women in there are on board. You are not coming into Grace Life Church paddling your own canoe. Why? Because the glory of God's at stake. It's not about me, it's about the glory of God and strife and division in doing your own thing dishonors our Lord.

I can't tell ya how important that is and I've never heard a statistic in over 30 years where we did not have over 90% of our worship attendance active in small groups. Now trust me, not all of them were doing what they outta do, not all of them are serving and fellowshiping like they ought to, but in that small group as a team they're evangelizing, as a team they're equipping one another and discipling one another, as a team in that small group they're bonding and there's transparency so they can learn each other's needs and wants, they can have compassion and mercy ministries for one another. There's a 1,001 beautiful body life ministries that go on in our small groups and that way every single person no matter how large a church gets if that's solid, can effectively minister to the whole body of Christ. And I can't tell you the time, for example, I've been in a hospital and we've had somebody critically ill and I've had hospital staff say, "Man, the way your church cares for each other." It glorifies God. I just believe that's one of the critical structures.

Now, I need hours on each one of these to teach to tell you all the blunders we've made, all the mistakes we've made where we've had to repent and change and think, "That's not quite right," and over approaching four decades on some of these that we've been wrestling with these things and, God willing, I'm gonna do that next at next year's conference. We're gonna have a little more informal setting, we'll have more Q&A And I'm gonna wade through all the stuff we've learned in these areas so hopefully it'll be a blessing to help some brothers do a better job and not make all the mistakes we've made. But that's critical.

Then personalized strategic world missions. That's another structure in the church. Now here here's where the wheel's effective but it may break down a little bit. Again, personalized strategic world missions depends on this pulpit. I am the missions pastor of this church. Brother Steve's an extension of me and a wonderful extension. I'd be lost

without him. He'd be the first one to tell you that I'm the missions pastor. Look, this pulpit's gotta be aflame with the glory of God among the nations. If I'm not preaching it, that don't work and the Spirit of God has to bring that conviction under the preaching of the word into the hearts of the members, and one of the reasons why a personalized strategic world missions, by the way, this conference is a part of our overall structure of personalized strategic world missions because it gets very personalized when you've got all these missionaries here for a week in all of our homes. Literally after this week is over, 400-500 of our people will have spent quality time with a church planter or a missionary. You know what they do when that happens? They get that billfold out, well, mine's over here and they say, "You know, I met that, brother. I believe in him. Where's my faith commitment offering? I'm gonna up it this year." That's why when I became the senior pastor here, in the life of the church we'd only given about \$45,000 to foreign missions, we're now at about 8 million dollars above and beyond all of our building programs and all our local tithes and offerings. That's because missions when it's personalized and it's not institutionalized and that's one thing we highly emphasize at Anchored in Truth. We don't want you to just throw us money, we want your heart in it. You can find a part of the overall work God's led us to be responsible for and you can find the area you can take ownership of and it becomes a personalized part and God's really blessed that aspect. But now listen to me: every small group has X number of church planters or missionaries they take care of so these are contingent upon each other. The strong small group helps make strong personalized strategic world missions. So so so so much I need to say, don't have time.

The third spoke, family discipleship. Um, what we've found through the years is it's gotta be real at home. There's so much I'd like to say here. I do not encourage a formal teaching structure in the home and there's a reason for that. The first reason is because when I was a young pastor, J. Vernon McGee said he didn't encourage a formal teaching structure at home and he said in his experience he had found that – listen – that can be wonderful and that can be blessed of the Lord. If you do that, hallelujah, I'm not against that, but he says if you've got an active faithful church, they're getting a lot of that. What they need to see is the mentoring and the living out and the realness in family life, talking the truths of God as it applies to life when you rise up in the morning, when you sit by the wayside, when you walk along the way, when you go to bed, and that's what Pam and I...look, this is all I do is formal teaching, I don't want to go home and sit down with my kids, "Okay, formal teaching time." They said, "Dad, we just had five hours of that at church this week." But what I can do is turn on the Andy Griffith show and we can watch something and I'll say, "Now that wasn't biblical right there, was it? Barney's lying." And I love the Andy Griffith show but Andy and Barney lie a lot on that show if you've watched it. They really do.

Now, honestly we literally did that, we would bring God's truth and our children learned though we formally teach it, it's real in our lives and that's what I mean by family discipleship. One of my daughters played college ball and we prayed about that and we kept things in perspective and we said we're not going to tournaments on Sunday except for a vacation Sunday or two I'll take every year, and we told coaches etc. because, you know, you've gotta do travel ball and all this kind of nonsense, and by the way, travel ball

has become a giant idol. Parents need to be proactive but we were proactive and we taught our daughter, we're gonna go to the coach and tell him what we are as Christians and if that fits his team and his tournament schedule fine, if not, that's fine too. You know what we found out? God takes care of stuff. He let her play in, ah, a Nike league that only plays in July and I take every July off. Coincidence.

Here's my point, if if you if in your life you talk about and teach the truths of Scripture, you've already got the formal training. All I'm saying it's gotta be real at home and here's what we found from the balance of New Testament teaching, every means of grace God's given the church can be exercised through this structure. Every one of them. Our church discipline comes out of small groups. Our world missions program is organized so that it's all personalized through small groups. Ah, the ministries of edification and exhortation, encouragement, mercy, through small groups.

And guys, boy, if I could just drill a hole in your head and into your heart and pour this in and stop it back up where it would never get out again, until these are good, don't do anything else. I know guys that, "Amen, we're with that. We're we're we're with you 100% but we're also doing this and this and this and this and this." And those are not bad things but your people can't do that many things well. If we have a men's thing, it's an extension of our men's small groups, not a replacement or an addition to it. If we have a women's thing, it's an an an an extension of our women's small groups, not a replacement for it or or or in addition to it. You you're overloading your people. I'm telling ya, if your people walk this out well and through it don't happen anymore because they just got tired of asking but I'd have people come in, "Brother Jeff, I read about this. I've heard about this women's and I've heard about this men's ministry. We ought to do this." I'd say, "We do that and we do it through small groups." And finally they just quit coming and, I mean, I'm look I'm four decades in. Do you know how many churches I've watched out here? Promise Keepers. This. This. None of that was bad, had some weaknesses but none of it evil, but do you know what? Where's Promise Keepers? But the local church small group with men in it holding each other accountable, discipling each other, discipling each other, loving and caring for each other, that's still going on because do you know what? These other ministries come and go but the church will always be here.

The rim. It's so important, Spirit empowerment. Your people have to be regenerate people. Oh my goodness, talk three hours on that. One of the great lessons we learned is we've got to fight the fight, the decades' fight of having a truly regenerate membership. None of it works without regenerate people and you you you just need to get over your infatuation with the sharp professional guy in town and the next slick guy and the wealthy man in town. God may saves some. I found out God, I couldn't use any of the wealthy men in town when I started as a pastor. They all had their own agendas, they all had...well, maybe not all of them but the great majority of them seemed to. So we had to grow our own wealthy men and we have men in our church today who are multimillionaires, very very very generous to God's work and they were broke and poor as you could be when they started 35 years ago with me.

So just grow your own and they're with ya. And I got over trying to draw those kind of people in to help us. Look, God'll draw them in or repel them back out through his truth. You just have a faithful pulpit. Again everything goes back to the pulpit but if the Spirit of God is not in it and blessing it, bringing the proper Gospel humility, I mean, Gospel humility is everything. None of this works if people aren't humble. If they're not gonna submit to the authority of their elders and find their place, I mean, what we tell people, they'll say, "Well, I'm really gifted. I've been in other churches and I've taught this and led that." We'll say, "Well, here's what you need to do, you need to go to a small group and support the leader in there and then when we see that for a while, we'll consider you for leadership because your spiritual character is more important than your spiritual ability to lead."

Now I'm just rambling because my wife said, "Why are you studying this so hard? You could talk about this for hours." And she's right but there's danger in that. What time am I supposed to be through, Steve? I'm gonna quit when my time's up. I'll be asking y'all to turn on the internet to get the rest of this session, I guess, but...

Let's go. Oh, I'm sorry. Outside the rim, what's the result of all this? A God-glorifying local church. If you're doing that right in the power of the Spirit, all the means of grace are exercised in an effective manner, the Spirit's empowering it, the world looks on it and says, "Man can't do that. We've never seen people like that before, never seen them function like that, never seen them love like that, never seen such a teamship, never seen such a sweetness and humility. How is that happening?" God. God gets the glory. It's not Jeff Noblit's system, I didn't come up with any of this. I just took the old Baptist Sunday school and made, ah, small groups. I just took the old Baptist emphasis on world missions and made personalized strategic world missions. Family discipleship has been around since I guess Adam and Eve got saved. This isn't new or clever. Guys, we just need to do it. It's like salt, it's right there but salt's no good if you don't apply it. But here's the problem, Brother Conrad over here, 30 years pastor, got a great church. I sense God's presence in his life and ministry 30 years. I bet it wasn't like this in year 5 or year 8. It's a long process and that's why I tell you all the time to have a 20 year vision, a 20 year vision, keep plugging away.

And we are probably in the coming days gonna erect some firmer boundaries on who we will fellowship with. That's one thing about being paid by my church, I, you know, you can't fire me. I mean, just Anchored in Truth is an extension of this church and I'm not worried about getting the right people in it. Some of you guys connected to the denominations, you've got that monster you've got to deal with. I mean, Southern Baptist Convention has everything imaginable doctrinally and methodologically and to some extent you're connected to it, you've got to cooperate with that to some extent. Now I understand being in there being salt and light and I support, we've got some good men in the Southern Baptist life, some godly men. Brother David Prince is one of those and I'm so thankful for his salt and light, but my point is I don't have to worry about, well if you don't like us, you're gonna hurt us financially. I mean, I'm not bound to that. I'm free from that. But what I'm saying is we need some boundaries on our fellowship as churches that if you're not, well, it's gone. It's back. You see, it never goes away. It's always there.

That we would want to, you don't have to do it just like us, we're not saying that, but if you're not committed to these things and there's thorough biblical foundation for them, then we may not can fellowship together in missions and in the Gospel. You don't have to do it just like I'm saying but, ah, I would say this to younger pastors, if you find a church that's got three to four decades under their belt and God's blessed it, why don't you just follow that for a while and quit being so doggone clever and unique? Okay, I'm gonna leave that. I've got to get...did you tell me a time? It's gonna be up here? Okay, thank you.

1 Timothy 3:15, Paul says, "Now Timothy, I'm writing to you that you will know how to conduct yourself in the household of God." Some say the word that "you" means strictly Timothy, I think it includes Timothy but I don't think it means strictly Timothy because the overseers and deacons involves the whole church, does it not? And the instruction women he's just dealt with involves the whole church, and how women should dress involves the whole church, and how women's motives for their dressing involve the whole church, and how men should exercise authority and teach, that's something the whole whole church is involved in. So he's talking about how the whole church is to conduct itself. This isn't, it may be to Timothy but it's for the admonition and edification of the whole local church body.

I'm trying to skim on very fast here. He says because the church is the pillar and support of the truth. Two Greek words there, one means more of a base, a foundation, one means a pillar as if on the base. Ah, the church is the holder and dispenser of the church, truth, listen, the church is not the originator of the truth. The church does not invent the truth and must not alter the truth at risk of judgment. That's why I'm in as I'm in as emphatic about church structures and functions where the Bible is clear as I am about the content of the Gospel because we don't get the choice to fashion his church our way, and brother, that's everywhere today. They call it a church, Brother David, they don't have enough biblical fidelity to even be called a church. John MacArthur some time ago started calling them non-churches. He said they're just so unsound, they don't think you can call it, it's a non-church because, folks, it's not our church. It's not our bride, it's his. What a awesome humbling trembling that we are responsible for fashioning his bride. I believe that will will give you some good biblical structures to do a better job at it.

The church, ekklesia, the local assembly of God's called out ones is a conduit through which the church is shown out or flows out and God gets the glory. The church, the ekklesia, the local assembly is God's theater to display the truth to all that all my see it, marvel over it and God gets the glory. If the church is not sound in proclamation, its pulpit, its doctrine, in fashion or in structure and in function, then the conduit is at least partially stopped up and the theater is putting on a false display, God's truth is not properly seen and marveled over and God is robbed of his glory. Is God getting the glory he deserves in your community because your church is sending out his light and his truth, not some silly culturally relevant, clever scheme in the church.

Now we all struggle there, do we not? There's things we do and we think, "Well, is this too far? Is this okay?" Um, Mike [unintelligible] I struggle with the fear of man. Well,

brother, I hope I'm correct here but as long as you're struggling with it, you might be okay because you can fight it and repent of it. It's when you think you ain't got it that you've probably been, uh, in the stronghold of it. So we'll always be struggling but, folks, I'm telling ya, a lot of what I'm saying even with the Reformed banner flying out front, is man-centered pragmatism, not truth-centered biblical structures and function, and actually that's why Anchored in Truth exists, because we fought and fought and fought our own selves, our own flesh, the own the pressures of the professing Christian world around us to try to be sound and we wanted the next generations of pastors to have somebody to encourage them in this journey and that's why we exist, to hope and encourage that.

Well, it's talking of the great excellencies of Jesus Christ. Paul says here, "By common confession, great is the mystery of godliness." He says for those of us who are spiritually through regeneration enabled to see the truth, we look at this this means God has, I should say this provision that God has, ah, wrought brought to us to cause us to be truly godly ones, to be the truly devout ones, to have a right standing before God and to rightly serve God, and where what is that provision? It's Jesus Christ. He he says it right there, "He who was revealed in the flesh," verse 16, "vindicated in the Spirit, seen by the angels, proclaimed among the nations, believed on in the world and taken up in glory." Jesus is God's wisdom. Jesus is God's... You would not have a standing before God as a truly pious one, which is what godliness means here, you would not be able to walk out the reality of being a true godly one if Jesus' power hadn't made you that and if Jesus' power and wisdom doesn't guide you in the serving of him in a godly way. It's all Jesus. It's all Jesus. So so so very much more we could say.

Some say today, "Well, if the pulpit is sound, then then that's just about everything. Everything else doesn't matter." Well, if your football coach is a brilliant communicator of football knowledge and football information and football schemes and a great promotion promoter but he has a losing record every year, is that good enough? No, the preaching is to the end of a healthy church to the end of the glory of God. I believe we've got some expositional idolatry and we've got guys who, I think, preached a pretty solid exposition for years but their churches are very unhealthy. It's not one or the other, it's both/and but one must lead to the other. Brother Justin told us discernment was one of the characteristics or a lack of discernment a characteristic of the unregenerate. I don't want to, I I I don't want to say this as as emphatically that it's always true but could it be that there's some great expositors out there that don't know the Lord? How can you not love the bride of Christ? How can you not care passionately that his church is right with him and honors him and causes people to marvel over him and see his wisdom and his beauty? It's not about your pulpit being strong, you're not gonna have a pulpit in heaven but there'll be a church in heaven, a purified and true one. We ought to at least between now and that day of glorification do the best we can to keep the bride.

You see, look, the the church is the pillar and support of the truth and I think another thing that's accurate in the total biblical teaching is the church is truth incarnate. You say, "Wait a minute, that's Jesus Christ." Yeah, but we're his body so I'd say we are the truth incarnate in infancy. Jesus lives in us, does he not? We are his body, are we not? We

walk in his truth, do we not? So they should see little Jesus when they see us. We are Christians, that's what the word Christian means, but not individuals. We get in the Bible and we want to make it an individual self-help manual. No, this book is for a local assembly to make us together in community a portrait of Jesus who is the truth, and having the proper means of grace functioning through the functioning through the proper structures of grace is essential.

I'm skipping a lot of stuff and I know you're happy and I praise the Lord for your happiness.

My point is, get the get the flow going now. God wants to glorify himself through his church and, by the way, are you listening to me? He's gonna be glorified through his church. Read Revelation, the last few chapters of Revelation. I challenge you to look for words like or phrases like "wife of the Lamb, the bride, the new Jerusalem," and look at the great emphasis and the great glory centered on the church when she is finally resurrected, purified and glorified. God's gonna make a big big big deal out of the church at the end. Our job is between now and then to at least help her get toward that end. I want his church to get some glory now that he gets the glory, not just all of it later. I don't know why we would care less about the church than he cares. If he gave his life to purchase her, to progressively sanctify her, and to one day in unbelievable magnitude of wonder to glorify her with his own glory, he'll dwell in her midst the Bible says, if he gave his life for that, we ought to live our lives for that. It's all about the glory of Jesus Christ and it's all about the church so let's give our very best and shepherd the flock of God according to the will of God.

Now, Lord willing, we'll try to spend many hours dissecting the means and the structures of grace that might be a help to all of us to achieve this ends as long as the Holy Spirit empowers it.

Let me pray for us.

Father, thank You for Your word and thank You that You have not left us without sure solid guidance. When You told us to shepherd the flock of God according to the will of God, You gave us in Your word Your will. I pray for all of these dear men of God here and then those who support the dear men of God, that they will have a passion and lash themselves to the ministry of preaching the word in the power of the Spirit. Nothing, nothing, Lord, as You've taught us, can rise to any any level of effectiveness or goodness apart from that. I pray we will take preaching disciplined people and organize them into small groups so they can effectively do body life and You'll be seen in the way they have love for one another, You'll be seen in the way they make disciples together, and You'll be glorified. I pray that we will further develop personalized and biblically strategic world missions out of our church. Lord, I pray these men would find somebody that they can connect with because Your New Testament is full of the churches cooperating together for missions. I pray that family discipleship, Lord, would be real, that it wouldn't be the legalism of a 15 minute family altar then we go and do our carnal stuff again, but it'd just be real. And I pray as all this is functioning, Lord, Your Spirit has to

empower it. It can't be our goodness, our charisma, it's gotta be Your Spirit. May it all be that You'll get glory through Your church and we get to be a part of that. In Jesus' name. Amen.