

A Permeating Culture of Gospel Humility

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Grab your Bibles and let's go to Ephesians 4. I don't remember how long ago it was, Brother Steve, when Matt Fortunato came to the first True Church Conference. He sat right over here behind me, three, four years? More than that maybe. And this fellow comes up, never met him before and he said, "I'm Matt Fortunato." He said, "I'm a pastor in the Church of Christ." Do you know what the Church of Christ is? Y'all know what that is? Works salvation. They believe in baptismal regeneration. But he said, "I found the Gospel of grace. I found the doctrines of grace and my heart has been changed and now I found your broadcast on the internet. We've been listening and following and heard about the conference." He tried to leave the church he was pastoring to adopt the doctrines of grace and that miracle didn't happen. I wish it had but it just didn't happen. Then he started this church plant and now up to 15 to 20 and good outreach events. Do you know what a huge thing that is to have two baptisms when you are where they are? Some of you guys can relate to that. It's just huge. I got goosebumps. So I thank Brother Jono Sims and Shelbyville Mills have been something of a primary mentor and have stood by this brother and it's just phenomenal what God is doing. So thank you. When you support financially Anchored in Truth, a check goes to Matt every month and that's how we can do this together. Grace Life Church, our people give generously to missions but we can't do it by ourselves and you can't either, and that's why the New Testament is filled with examples in Paul's ministry of churches connecting together to get evangelism and church planting done. So praise the Lord for that.

I don't know about you but when Brother Jono Sims got through last night, I could have gone home and said, "That was a good conference." Amen? That was a good word. Brothers, those of you a little younger in the ministry, take that in. Let me say one thing about Jono Sims' preaching. This is understood but I want to say it this way: Jono Sims does not preach the sovereignty of God, he preaches the word of God. If you preach the word of God faithfully, you deal heavily with the sovereignty of God. Amen, Brother Jono? If we went to the next text and it said God isn't sovereign, we're going to preach that, amen? Of course, it's not going to say that. My point is you preach the word, lash yourself to what the Bible is saying according to the intent of the original author, grammatically correct, get the context right, and thunder that to your people and God will grow a church. Now, he might thin out your congregation. You see, most of you went to a church and what you have is a congregation and you've got to find a church in there

somewhere. Amen. That's just the way it is. I'm sorry. I'm still waiting for the exception but that's pretty much where it is. What a blessing that was.

I want to talk about the essential trait of having a church that is permeated with the culture of Gospel humility. The permeation of Gospel humility in the local church. When you look at Grace Life Church of the Shoals, I always word it this way because it's always true, while we are still repenting and still growing and learning, I have a precious, sweet, humble, unified church. Watch the way they serve. Watch the way they work. All that it takes, you can't imagine all that it takes to put this on and these people do it with joy and I'm in year 37. This isn't a new fad for us. We've done stuff like this for 37 years. There is only one way that keeps on like this, there is only one way a people maintain a humble spirit like that, and that is God has done something in their hearts. God has done something and it's so hard for me to stay on track when I'm talking to you guys, but you and I are so tempted to get cute in the ministry and get clever, be contemporary and relevant because this stuff we're talking about is hard and it takes a long time. Amen? And then you'll find some reformed guy and he's got a new clever approach. You know, if you're cool enough and hang out at the right coffee shops, you can build a church. Well, I like coffee shops, nothing wrong with that, nothing wrong with hanging out at the coffee shops, hearing the Gospel or meeting people, but that's not the way you build a church.

As we get to Ephesians 4, when you get to Ephesians 4, you are dwelling on mountaintops of sovereign grace. Let's read it together, if you would. Ephesians 4:1-6. Paul says,

1 Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, 2 with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love, 3 being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. 4 There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling; 5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism, 6 one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all.

We just can't take this text out of context. Again, when you get to this point and what Paul has already established in this letter, you are dwelling on the mountaintops of sovereign grace. And very quickly, now this is going to be a jet tour blitz through Ephesians 1, and chapter 2, down to verse 10.

Look at Ephesians 1 right quick and let's get this foundation stone that must be understood if you're going to get to the unity, or rather the humility that brings the unity that Paul is talking about in chapter 4. He begins talking about, let's go on down to verse 4, "just as He chose us," I'm in chapter 1, "just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love," verse 5, "He predestined us to adoption as sons," last part of verse 5, he did this "according to the kind intention of His will." So Paul right out of the gate writes this letter to this church in Ephesus and jumps right into the core of sovereign grace. He tells them right

off the bat, "He chose you before the foundation of the world that you would be holy and blameless before Him in love. He has predestined you to adoption as sons." And why did he do this? "He did it according to the kind purposes of His will." He just chose to do it. He's God, he can do it that way.

He goes on and we get to verse 6, he did this all "to the praise of the glory of His grace," that is, that he might get great glory for how he could accomplish such a thing in saving us and making us his church. Verse 7, "In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace." Verse 8, "He lavished on us," he didn't just kind of give us a token, he lavished God-sized heaping amounts of grace on us in saving us.

Go down to verse 11, "also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will," verse 12, "to the end that we who were the first to hope in Christ would be to the praise of His glory." Verse 13, "In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation--having also believed," there was that moment in time when in sovereign grace we are brought to a responsibility of repentance and faith having also believed, verse 13, then "you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise." The Spirit of God comes. He does this work of drawing and convicting and regenerating. We come to repentance and faith and that is the seal that God has done a work. God's authenticating seal. All of this God is doing. All of this is God's grace. All of this is God's goodness toward us undeserving unworthy sinners.

Now turn on over to chapter 2, verse 1. He wants to reiterate where we were and how God found us. Chapter 2, verse 1, "And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience." Verse 3 of chapter 2, "Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest." So basically in verse 1 he says you were dead. Then secondly, you walked according to the course of this world. You were deviant. You walked according to the prince of the power of the air. You were demonized. He said of the spirit that is working in the sons of disobedience, you were disobedient. Then in verse 3, you lived according to the lusts of your flesh, indulging in the desires of your flesh. You were deranged. And then the last part of verse 3, you were by nature children of wrath. You were damned. Dead. Deviant. Demonized. Disobedient. Deranged. And damned. That's where you were. That's where God found you. You've got to preach this. If I was preaching this in my church, I might take three weeks just on that. I want my people to feel the truth of who they are before a holy God apart from grace.

Then you come to verse 4. What a glorious conjunctive word, "But." God found you that way, "But God, being rich in mercy." God didn't try to work up some mercy, he's just rich in it naturally. "Being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved)." This initiative of God to act on us dead, deviant,

demonized, disobedient, deranged and damned creatures and act on us in verse 6, "raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus." As I told my church when I preached through this, in chapter 1, he chose us and predestined us before we were born; now in chapter 2, he has seated us in heaven before we die.

Verse 7, "so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus." God is doing all this so that he might show off what he could do with us wretches and make us to be ones who have the very holiness and righteousness of his Son Jesus Christ.

Verse 8, "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast." Verse 10, we come to this climactic crescendo, redundant there but it is, glorious verse 10. "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them." The scholars tell us that really in the Greek you wouldn't translate this "for we are His workmanship," it's as if Paul by the time he gets here is so full of the glorious aspects of God's wisdom, power and beauty in saving us, that Paul doesn't say we are his workmanship, Paul just exclaims it and says, "His workmanship we are." You've got to have that foundation before you get to chapter 4. You see, so many of us work at unity and that's not the goal. You need to work at getting your people broken and humbled and grateful, then the unity comes. It's a long-term process.

So having been exalted to these inconceivable heights of glory and dignity by the merits and the work of Jesus Christ on our behalf, Paul is now saying in chapter 4, "Now live like you've been exalted like this. Live like you are one of these creatures of this high glory and dignity." That's why he says in chapter 4, verse 1, "Therefore," based on the truths we have already laid out, "Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called." You have been called out of all these wicked things, out of this position of damnation, depravity, into this glorious status of the Son of God through the merits of Jesus Christ. Now walk like that.

Now verse 2, he says here in chapter 4, this new walk will have these virtues in it, "with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love." If these virtues are not at least in their germ form present in you and over time increasing, then we can conclude that the exaltation has not taken place. You're not one of those who he has called. You're not one of those who has experienced the new birth. You're not one of those who has believed on Jesus Christ. One Puritan said, "They that know God will be humble, and they that know themselves cannot be proud."

These virtues he lists here, humility, gentleness, patience, tolerance for one another in love, these virtues are Gospel-wrought virtues. Did you hear me? These are Gospel-wrought virtues. You don't get these because you were taught them in a seminar by some Christian psychologist. These are Gospel-wrought virtues. They do not exist apart from the Gospel being faithfully preached and the Spirit's application in the hearts of men and women in your church.

Now, I believe the first virtue listed here is listed first for a reason, that is, humility. Now, while all of these could be seen as links in the chain of Christian fellowship, humility is necessarily the first link. You see, having begun the journey of increasingly grasping the glory and the wonder of the Godhead's salvation of us, that is, we are increasingly grasping God the Father who authored it, and God the Son who procured it, and God the Holy Spirit who applied it to us, we are increasingly enthralled with the wisdom, the power and the beauty that is possessed by our gracious saving God and brought, and this all brings us to a profound life-changing condition, humility. If these great doctrines don't humble you, you may know something or the articulation of the doctrine but you just don't know the God of the doctrine. These things are not just here to increase our knowledge that we might boast we are the new Gnostics, we have insight that others don't have. They are written to make us grateful, help us to get over ourselves and our preferences and our pettiness to be humble.

A deepening and quieting spirit of gratitude is central to a maturing believer. On the one hand, we are astutely confident of our standing before God, and at the same time we are equally and profoundly humbled by this standing. Did you hear that? We are greatly confident in the standing Christ has given us, and yet at the same time profoundly humbled that he has given us that standing. We cry from our hearts with the psalmist, Psalm 115:1, "Not to us, O LORD, not to us, But to Your name give glory Because of Your lovingkindness, because of Your truth."

But humility is this first virtue that the apostle says ought to be coming out of your life as one of those who has received this Gospel salvation. I believe it's first because in a great degree the others depend upon it, or the others grow out of it. Jonathan Edwards said that humility is one of the most essential things that characterizes Christianity. You see, in the order of the saving experience, nothing much happens before the humbling that occurs from the conviction of sin. There is no reason to turn to a Savior if there hadn't been the humbling of seeing yourself as a woeful sinner offensive to a holy God. Hillary Clinton was right, we are deplorable. We really are. Well, she probably meant it in a different way than we understand it, but it's a good word for us.

So note the overall context here. So based on the growing Spirit-wrought grasp of sovereign grace that saves us, chapter 1 through chapter 2, verse 20, then these virtues consequently should be developing in our lives starting with humility. Then as we go further in the text, he's going to talk about unity. In Paul's mind, everything is the local church. Some of us would do good to get more Pauline like. Everything is the local church. Everything he writes is to churches, and about churches, in the context of churches, for the benefit of the churches. These guys that take the Bible and use it as some self-help manual for individuals in their individual lives are missing and raping the whole context of Scripture. It's a church book. So Paul is writing to a local church and writing to this local church, he says, "If you're getting the Gospel of grace that saved you, it's necessarily humbling you. It's necessarily doing that work in you that makes you forget yourself, and then the result of all of you individual ones being humbled is a corporate unity then begins to grow." But the humility comes first.

If we strive after these virtues beginning with humility, then unity is the fruit. As the church of the Lord Jesus Christ, unity is our possession, though unfortunately it's not always our profession. Unity is our nature, though unfortunately it's not always our behavior and that's why Paul continues on and talks about putting on the new man, put on the new self. If you will walk in what you are, if you will put on the new true you that God has made you to be and get out of the flesh, then you'll find unity as the fruit and the byproduct of that.

Now, what Paul is going to point out here in the rest of these verses is that the God who saved us is an absolutely indivisible united God. You can't be more united than God is. You can't be more one than God is. And we are, Ephesians 2:10, his workmanship. He doesn't do anything that's not of unity. There is a oneness to everything he does. So in verses 4 through 6 as we get to this section, this new truth comes out, and that is Paul is pointing out this absolutely indivisible united God was 100% united in his work to save his children and secure his church. Everything about him, his nature, his unity, oneness, and everything about his work is characterized by unity and a oneness. Here God is the Trinity and he's God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit, but they are yet one God. You see, in God you don't get $1 + 1 + 1 = 3$. In God you get $1 + 1 + 1 = 1$. He's just always one. "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one God." He is a God of unity. He is united in nature and he is united in his work – now listen – and his pinnacle work is his church. So his church must, indeed it will, 1, reflect his nature of unity and be consistent with the intention of his work to produce a unified people. In a very real sense, you can no more split a church than you can split the Godhead. That's what he's going to get to in just a moment. You can no more really split or disunify a church than you can split or disunify the Godhead. You can split a congregation but you can't really split a church.

So let's look at verses 4 through 6 now and see this unified God that worked in holy unity to produce a people, the church, who then must live in that unity because we are his offspring. We are of his nature and this unity wholly depends on each member first possessing a Gospel humility by increasingly grasping the glories of sovereign grace salvation that he outlined so thoroughly in chapters 1 and 2. But you've got to get the whole picture. Sovereign grace salvation, regeneration, a transformed life, and consequently sanctifying, growing in that, produces a humility, it always does, which produces a corporate unity, always does, and when we are corporately united by the power of God according to the truth of God, we are the most powerful witness of God and his truth to the community around us. "All men will know you are my disciples because of the glorious doctrines you hold." That's not what he says. "All men will know you are my disciples by the love you have," unity, "for one another." Now we do hold to those glorious doctrines and proclaim them but not to show off our knowledge but that it might produce the unity that causes us to be seen as a type of body, a type of organization, a type of collectivity that no one in the world can reproduce. The world can't get what we've got because they don't have the God and the power forming it that we've got. So there is a distinction about us.

So when you get to verses 4 through 6, we see this unified God who has unified to bring about this effect, this concluding work of saving his children and building his church.

Notice the word "one" is mentioned seven times in verses 4 through 6. One body. One Spirit. One hope. One Lord. One faith. One baptism. One God and Father of all. So you have seven elements of unity centered around three persons of the Godhead. God the Spirit is emphasized in verse 4: one body, one Spirit, one hope. God the Son is emphasized in verse 5: one Lord, one faith, one baptism. God the Father in verse 6: one God and Father of us all. What is Paul saying? Once again, you can't divide God. One. One. One. One. He's indivisible.

Actually, when you get to verse 4, the two words "There is" are not in the original autograph, and I agree with the scholars that the text makes better sense to leave that phrase, "There is," out, "There is one body." What he's saying is he's just in the flow of his thought with all humility, gentleness, patience, showing tolerance for one another in love, verse 3, then diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace, one body, one Lord. He just continues with that at that point. It gives it a lot stronger power. The point is that the church is an invisible reality and the church has an invisible unity, even if they are not living out the unity outwardly that God has given. In one sense, church members are only truly known to God. God himself, or God rather could say to himself, "I have but one church." However, outwardly the church consists in visible local bodies of believers. We can properly say this Grace Life Church is a church, not just part of something bigger. In one sense it is, in an ultimate glorified sense, but we can refer to it as a church.

So when Paul is giving us these exhortations here, he must mean that the local assembly, Ephesus, the local church here, and every other local church, that we are to strive to maintain visibly what God maintains invisibly. We are to illustrate to the world the true and glorious unity of God by being unified ourselves. Again, we are talking a lot about unity and you say, "Well, your message was on humility." That's because I can't talk about humility without talking about unity. The text won't let me. And that's part of the problem we get to when we write books or do conference sermons, we get things segmented off that have to have each other. You've got to be careful about that in your teaching. It's like teaching a lot of these great truths and leaving out God's purpose for the local church. You've missed it. Brothers and sisters, if you miss the local church, you've missed everything in biblical exegesis. It's all about the church. When Paul gives us those glorious doctrines of sovereign grace in the early chapters, it's to the end that he can say to a local church, "Now walk worthy of this as a church family." It always gets back to the local church. Have I ever told you I'm strong on the local church? That's not because I'm smarter, it's that my God is strong on the local church. He loves it.

He says in verse 3 to be diligent now to preserve the unity of the Spirit. Now he didn't say to be diligent to create unity. Did you hear me? You don't create unity with all your little clever fleshly nonsense that you do in the local church to try to get people together. "Well, we've got a rock climbing group over here. We've got motorcycles for Jesus over there. We're going to do all the fleshly worldly things because that's what you are united around." That's wrong! That's wrong! The church is united around Christ and his Gospel. You can be in a motorcycle group, go and kill yourself on the thing, I don't care, but that's not what you build a church around. "We've got a big crowd because we've got

motorcyclers for Jesus this Sunday." Yeah, and you blaspheme God who said your unity is bigger than that nonsense. Our unity is not built on this stuff we are so prone to look to in the church today, in the professing church today.

He says be diligent to preserve the unity God has already given you. Spare no effort, it means. It means with haste and with passion. The full effort you have, make sure you bring out. So for you as a preaching pastor, what are you to use your full effort in doing so your church can be humble as individuals and be united as a whole? What can you give your whole energy to? Preaching the word in the power of the Spirit. That's your job. That's how you get this done. Now we all have different things we must do but the pastor must do that if we are going to have humbled people who are united as God intends them to be. You cannot have more unity and you cannot be more one than the Godhead, and since we are of him, we must reflect him. So be diligent, he says, to bring this about.

Then he says we are one body. That means, by the way, this is not an exhortation, this is a declaration. He said you are one body and I'm just skimming over fast because of time, leaving out lots of stuff.

Then he says you are one Spirit. Now mind you, this is not the human spirit. There is a specialness about humanity because we are made in the image of God where sometimes we see these phenomenal feats of courage or sacrifice and we say, "That's a great human spirit," and that's accurate but that's not what this is talking about. One Spirit is not the human spirit. It's not team spirit where there is this camaraderie, unanimity around a goal or a task you are about as a team. That can be special when we talk about a team spirit. That's not what we are talking about here. This is not the human spirit. This is not the human spirit or team spirit. We are all one because the work of God's Holy Spirit has worked in us individually and changed all of us. God did this.

There is one hope. This means a sure and certain hope. We have the hope of glorification together. We have the hope of the resurrection together. We all have this commonly. We are united in this.

There is one Lord. This has the idea of sovereignty and ownership. We've all pledged allegiance to one Lord that unifies us.

There is one faith. This is not talking about objective faith like Jude refers to in Jude 3 where he talks about the Gospel or the faith that we have been once and for all delivered to the saints. This is that subjective faith. We have all been acted on by the Spirit under the preaching of the Gospel and all have experienced this repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.

There is one baptism all have in common, that we have publicly identified with Christ. And in this day, believer's baptism was a radical countercultural event. It would be like us going to Tehran, Iran and getting in the public square and saying, "I reject Mohammed. I reject Islam. I claim Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior," and being baptized in front of

all of them. It really meant something. Truly, the early disciples many of them were signing their death warrant by baptism. He said that we have that in common. We've all partaken of that ordinance.

One God and Father of us all. The church is one because it is pervaded by one Spirit. The church is one because it's owned and governed by one Lord. The church is one because it has one God and one Father, the glorious being to whom it looks to as a child looks to a parent. He is over all and through all and in all, Paul says here. He pervades all of us with his life-giving presence.

So you can see and there is so much more I'd like to say, but you can see how Paul has come to this point and he's saying, "Do you not get it, church? Do you not get it, local church?" You can't be more united than the Godhead. Everything about your salvation is of him. The Holy Spirit convicted you and called you. Jesus the Son died and was the substitutionary atonement for you. God the Father authored this and prescribed it all and you are of him. Unity must be the result and unity is only going to be the result if your people are first humbled; if there is a permeating culture of Gospel humility in your church.

Let me give you six real quick practical things, just six real quick practical things that now in my 37th year of pastoral ministry we feel has been used of God to build a sense of Spirit-wrought humility. By the way, there are so many things that could be said about humility, especially in terms of counterfeit humility and false humility. We've all had some of those guys come around who parade their humility and it's really pride. There is so much we need to say there so I would first say, I'm going to give you an insight right here, here's how you'll know if this super humble saint is true or counterfeit. Are you listening? Do they submit to authority? That's it. So many of these folks parade their humility but you'd better let them do "their ministry their way in the church," or they will split it four ways. Here's how you'll know Brother Jono, they'll come to the pastor or the elders and say, "How can I serve the Lord here?" If they're not humbled to the God-ordained authority in the local church, then they are not truly humble. "Yeah, but they just cry and serve." Yeah, and it's all Satan.

Now, I'll make one caution here: it's possible an immature brother or sister may not have been taught well about biblical authority in the local church and they didn't learn better. I would hold that out but I've seen it over and over and over again, if they are spiritual, they will yield their humble service to the guidance and the oversight of their church elders. That's the only way you can have, you can't have all these humble people doing all their own thing. That's chaos and disorder. They've got to be unified under the headship of pastors following the Scriptures.

Well, 1, pastors, first of all I would say... That was a side note, by the way. That's something I didn't mean to get into. My time is much too short. Model spiritual humility. Pastor, model spiritual humility. As you preach, always intertwine your testimony of how these texts affect you; how you sense how you are undone before God; how you sense you have no hope but the Gospel of grace. Paul said he was the chief of sinners and that's

what he was doing. He says, "Whatever else I preach to you, I want you to know I feel the weight as if I'm the greatest of sinners."

Another way you model spiritual humility is that as you lead the church, you abandon all hope in human cleverness and human creativity, in human winsomeness and in human warmth, and you trust entirely in the Gospel and the power of the Spirit to win the lost, sanctify the saved, and build the church. You see, you're not humble until you humble yourself to God's methods. You're still proud if you're trying to build the church in your methods and not God's methods. So you abandon any trust.

Now look, every pastor should be creative in some ways, and every pastor should be warm in some ways, of course, but I'm saying are you trusting in that? "Boy, I'm going to get that family because I have shown them the sweetness and the warmth and the kindness nobody else is showing them." Yes, show them that, but make sure they are not won to you, make sure they are won to Jesus. There are some benefits to being a mean pastor like me. I'm really a lot nicer than you think I am but my point is, on the list of pastors who influence people by their sweet personality, I'm not super high on that list. I want to be. I want to do better. I want to be sweeter, nicer and kinder, but people frustrate me sometimes. But God help us to have one more church member because they love you. They should love you because you have presented them with the Jesus that loves them and they love you for getting them to the Jesus that loves them. That's why my people love me. My people love me but they don't love me because I'm special, they love me because they've found Christ through my preaching. Model a spirit of humility.

2. Practice church discipline. Now be careful here. You've got to go slow and you've got to start at the right place. So many guys go headlong and they start at the wrong places but practice church discipline. A church without discipline is a church without Christ. There is no true church of Christ without an effort to maintain some standard of holiness and purity in the body. We tell our people here, "Look, we're not out to chase people down and beat people up. That's not our hearts." We always approach people with humility and compassion, long-suffering, and always always always in strict confidentiality. But brazen, ongoing, unrepentant sinners cannot be maintained in the church if you ever hope to have any humility in your church or unity in your church. A little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough. If you let that kind of spirit stay in your church, it will just pollute everything. An unrepentant sinner. Look, I've heard somebody say, "Well, you know, the church is a place for sinners." No it's not, it's a place for repenting sinners. But an un-repenting sinner, a person who just won't work with you, won't even try, an un-repenting sinner is proud and a disunifier every time. Practice church discipline.

3. Strive toward a regenerate membership. Like we have to say that, but you really do. There is a strong notion that, "Well, we know these people are probably not saved but we're trying to keep them happy and they give good." Oh my gosh. We should be striving toward regenerate membership. Purge your church rolls. Now there is a process to that. We can help you with that if you want that help. Preach a true Gospel. Thunder the truth of what the Gospel is. Preach true conversion.

There are a couple of resources I would throw out there that I think might be helpful. I have a series called "The Pretenders" that I think had a strong effect on the body here to get us straightened out in this area of what true conversion is. The series on "Pretenders." I've got a message called "The Eternal Life Test." It could be very helpful. Those two could help you. I guess they are in the bookstore. I have no idea.

Develop a sound seeker counseling ministry. All of this is under regenerate membership. Develop a sound seeker counseling ministry. We have a little book on counseling seekers that we developed from some Puritan writings that I think would be very helpful. I think they're in the bookstore.

Develop a sound baptismal counseling ministry. We have a series of messages, some fill in the blanks so that people can go through, and we don't require anybody to understand everything that Scripture teaches about the doctrine of baptism, the ordinance of baptism, but we want them to understand as much as possible so they will have a healthy robust grasp of what they are doing in baptism.

So model spiritual humility, practice church discipline, strive toward a regenerate membership. 4. Practice biblical conflict resolution. Biblical conflict resolution. This was such a blunder at Grace Life Church. We got to this way too late. We were disciplining people here for everything in the world but we would let sects and groups and divisive people go on and on and on thinking we were being humble by letting them have their way and speak their mind. No they weren't, they were destroying the body of Christ. They were factious and divisive and so we had to learn how to do biblical conflict resolution and we actually, I preached on it first and then we actually voted as a church a new policy of what we will do when we have disagreements or conflicts among us and how we will resolve them biblically. We're going to have some problems, amen, but we can resolve those biblically and not disunify the church.

"Peacemakers" by Ken Sandy was the resource for my sermons and we've developed small group studies and they are all in the bookstore, and I would with all of my passion tell you do this in your church; teach every 2 to 3 years we will do a little revision, if you will, or we will do against the studies on conflict resolution, a reduced down version of it, because I think the original was like 13 sessions, so that our people stay reminded, "Here's how we are going to deal with things if we get at odds with one another."

5. Keep humility right side up. Keep humility right side up. Here's what I mean. Far too often pastors are tempted to practice humility upside down. In other words, they have a God-centered and carnal view of humility. They have a backward view of humility. Here's the foundational truth, the foundational truth of humility is whom you bow before and to whom you have pledged allegiance. That's true humility. Here's what I'm getting at: when you bow before and humble yourself before Christ, then you must say no to any and every voice that contradicts Christ's orders. So the next power hungry controlling person that comes into your church and starts sort of throwing their weight around and demanding something and you have that upside down concept of humility that says,

"Well, I ought to be humble and let him have his way," that's not true. If he is violating Scripture and violating what Christ has called you to do as the pastor and what God has called the church to be and do, you've got to understand you've already humbled yourself to another Jesus Christ, you can't humble yourself to him. Know whom you've humbled yourself before.

Now, if possible, we had a guy, he ran hundreds of millions of dollars corporation, joined our church, came in and he wasn't here a few months and he was telling us how everything ought to be run. And we loved him and were kind to him and sometimes he would say, "You know, I think we ought to do this at the church picnic." Do you know what we say? "Fine, we'll do that," because it's a picnic, it doesn't matter. But he got into some things that mattered and church members said you need to go and talk to the elders on that, and he realized right away, "I'm not going to get a following in this church." So he said, "God called him to another church," and now he's a blessing over there, because we decided a long time ago we have already humbled ourselves to somebody and we can't contradict or dishonor the one we have humbled ourselves before, Jesus Christ, to serve any power monger who might walk in our church doors.

Would I be exaggerating to say that 70% of all so-called church growth in evangelical churches today is due to the pastor catering to their flesh and their ego instead of the pastor calling them to humble service in the local church? When we changed this years ago, our numbers of people who came to join went down, but all the quality went way up. We'll have 50, 60 new members maybe in a year's time but almost without exception they are close to 95, 100% of them are long-term, faithful, solid folks now. Instead of having 300 come in and I can't find 95% of them two years later.

Don't cater to people's flesh. Pastors are tempted to promise a prospective family power in the church, position in the church. "Hey, we'll give you a good moral environment for your children, and of course, you get your free ticket out of hell here. We'll entertain you. We'll make you feel good on Sunday. We'll serve you and care for you in times of need. We'll give you the opportunity to be a part of something that's edgy and cutting edge and we have the most invigorating and entertaining 'Sunday worship event' in town." And on and on and on we could go. No, what we are to do is call people to serve Christ in the local church and if they have experienced chapter 1 down through chapter 2, verse 10, do you know what they'll say? "That's what I've been looking for." You've got to decide are you going to draw sheep or are you going to draw goats. Are you going to attract sheep or are you going to attract goats?

6. The most important one of them all, practical aspect: preach the word in the power of the Spirit. Preach the word in the power of the Spirit. Give up anything and everything else that keeps you from having the time and the energy to preach the word through the power of the Spirit. I am in year 37 and I believe we've had as many difficult, heart-wrenching, depressing splits, warfares and issues in this church that you can possibly have, but there is a reason why in year 37 I can still preach with conviction and power and authority, because my church has freed me to spend my energies and my time studying, praying, meditating on, a very important part, and preaching the word. Nothing

will supplant this. Again, you can be the coolest guy in the coffee shop and start getting people to come to your church that way but it's the preaching of the word that will help those people begin to grasp the glories, the wisdom, the power, and the beauty of God in sovereign grace, and as they are increasingly grasping those things, it will inevitably and always lead to a humble soul, and when your church is filled with those humble souls, you have unity, and when you have unity, God gets the glory.

Hang in there. Keep on keeping on. I'm in year 37. I mean, it takes a while to see these things develop. Keep on keeping on and make the centerpiece and the foundation of whatever you do preaching the word exegetically in the power of the Spirit.