

Savage Wolves from Within, p.2

True Church Conference 2022

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We're always aware of churches going through factions and divisions and splits unfortunately. Well, how should I say unfortunately? It's part of God's purpose and plan. It really is. I can prove that textually but I don't have time. Um, so that's always the case, Brother Jono, we're always, there's always brothers facing that but not like this year. I mean, we have so many brothers here right now who've just gone through like Brother Mack, terrible split in the church, and some others of you who know it's just right around the corner and so you've heard testimony after testimony, you gonna get through this and you, we say the church splits, I understand that, I don't really believe in church splits, I believe in goat removals. I don't really...and if God's, God never uses anything he doesn't clean up so I just want to add that emphasis, hang in there.

And one of the problems I have in teaching things is there's not time to teach all the balancing truths and one thing I want to say right quick before we go to, if you would, Tommy, go ahead and put the tree back up with all the points on it, about expositional preaching and I'm gonna use Brother Jono's illustration here. If, if you talk to Brother Jono about the effectiveness of Shelbyville Mills, the maturity of the church, the sweet unity, um, it is a model church. Um, he's gonna talk about expositional preaching and, but he's lying. Now here's what I mean by that. This man has left blood all over the ground of applying his preaching to the church. Now you don't think about that, brother, you just think that's understood but, brother, it's not understood. Some guys think it's just almost like a superstitious magic formula. If you actually read the text, shazam, mature church. Well, this is true and I hope I'm not being too redundant with what, what I'm gonna bring out in a moment. Preaching the word in the power of the Spirit produces a godly humility in the church and causes the people to be ready and able to be structures and formed and do ministry but that takes some effort outside of the pulpit. So when you see, when you hear Jono Sims's exposition, what you're not seeing is untold hours of warfare and work in structuring his church and sharpening his church and disciplining the church and managing and shepherding the flock to live out what the text said in his preaching. So, um, I don't want to diminish the powerful, miraculous, essential nature of the preaching of the word but it's to the end of further follow-through, all right?

Let's go to the limbs on the tree. We've got the root of a Bible driven understanding, a biblical theology that flavors the totality of our study and our preaching, uh, the instrument, the trunk of the tree that holds everything up is preaching the word in the

power of the Spirit, and then we come to the limbs, what I call biblical structures and strategies, ecclesiology if you want to use another word, but I, now just what do we do? How does this thing, what does it look like? And I can't tell you how much in the first 15, uh, that'd be about right, years of my pastoral ministry I knew what was wrong but I wasn't really sure what was right. I mean, I was troubled about easy-believism. I was troubled about unrepented of sinners all in our churches. I, I was troubled about missions was just throwing money at a distant missions agency and not all of that's completely wrong but I thought I know this isn't the best way and really through just thumbing along, learning here and there, trial and error, we put together these biblical structures and strategies. Nobody has ever from the Scriptures shown me a better way to convince me to change. If you don't choose my terminology and my way, this isn't, my way's not the final word on anything, but I think it is a proven way for four decades now to function as a church.

1. Under the biblical structures and strategies is every member ministry through small groups. A goal, there, there can be no concept of healthy church life unless you are striving, you'll never get there 100% unless you are striving that every member is ministering, scripturally defined ministering in the body of Christ. Um, we found no other way and there's no other biblical example of how to facilitate that than small groups. Baptists used to call it Sunday school. Some people call it cell groups. I really discourage meetings outside of the church plant. If you can get classrooms, Sunday school rooms built, that's a whole another several hour discussion, that's the best way. Um, before the pandemic, we regularly ran 85-95% of our worship attendance every week in small groups. For a church our size, that's totally unheard of but that's because you can't work harder at small groups than we work at small groups. I mean, for 40 years we have worked extremely hard. We have about 70 small groups right now and it is to the end of organizing the people of God in small enough groups so they can learn each other, bond together, be transparent and therefore live out the truth I've preached to them on Sunday. Live out the Christianity we proclaim from the pulpit.

Brother Chris, that takes some work, though, to get those small groups up and going and, I mean, that's why and, and brothers, God knows my heart. I, I don't want to beat you guys up. That's not my spirit. You might say, "Well, you do a pretty good job of it." Give yourself some, that's why I say 20 year vision. This is stumbling and halting and two steps forward and one and three-fourths back sometimes. It's just, but you just keep going because you can't measure if God's used you to build a church at year six or year nine. Sometimes you're in year 13 or year 18 and you have a split. You know, I've had three splits here of about 600 total people left, 600 total people? Now in our area, a non-metropolitan, non-growing area of northwest Alabama, that's huge. Now fortunately we've about swapped out even. We've replaced them with folks who want to be here. But my point is, if I at any time and Brother Jono, I felt at that time in my pilgrimage that I'm a failure. I, well, I would have been but God was doing something I couldn't see. Here's what happens. When you're reforming, the people that hate God and hate the truth and hate you are very loud, the people that are with you have never seen reform before so they're quiet and not saying much, they're just learning and it makes you think nobody's with you. So you've gotta keep going until the people who are with you that are learning

start saying, "Hey, wait a minute, pastor, I like, I'm getting it and I'm seeing it and I'm with you."

So we keep going but small groups, what a, and I just came up with this thinking about this preparing this, um, message and that is that you might look at it this way, like a shotgun. In a shotgun you've got a shell, for those of you that aren't rednecks, it's a shell. There's a wad, well, there's gunpowder, there's a wad, and then there's the shot that goes out. And, and, in, in the church preaching the word is like the firing pin and the powder, small groups is like the wad and the pellets. The preaching of the word is, is used powerfully to miraculously change lives, convert souls, energize the saints, convict them to be humble and ready to go to work. Well, that's the bang but then to take the game, there's gotta be the production of the wad pushing the shot out to be successful. So that's kind of a picture of what I'm talking about.

Small groups is the arena where the saints live out their Christian duties and services, not all of their Christian duties and services but many, or we may say the bulk of their Christian duties and services. I have no place in my theology for things outside of the local church taking a significant amount of your people's times and calling it Christian ministry. I just, I just don't, I don't have that. I, I mean, I'm not here to condemn all of that, I'm just saying from, from Matthew through Revelation and particularly the ministry of Paul, I see one simple thing: preach the word, win lost souls, establish local New Testament churches, and make them help you do, do that again other places. That's all we see. It's just not, and there's nothing else there but local church life.

So I think I'm safe with God to say sell out to a local church, give it your all. Well, first of all, find one that where the pastor is trying to build a biblically and spiritually healthy church. Now don't judge him on how far he's gotten, it's a long journey, but if his heart is to do it right, stay there with him, support him, and give your all to it, and on the judgment day I think you're gonna hear, "Well done, good and faithful servant." If you don't, say, "It's Jeff Noblit's fault. He told me to pour my all in one of Your local churches." And I'll bear the blame.

Acts 2:42, the church is just starting in the book of Acts, thousands are getting saved and we have this verse, "Day by day continuing with one mind in the temple and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart." I don't think this is an incidental narrative on the historical situation. Whether you call it prescriptive or descriptive, to me it doesn't matter. The church is starting and the leaders of the church, functioning of the leadership of the Holy Spirit had the whole group meet as a congregation in Solomon's portico but also they are meeting in small groups house to house. I think what that means is they wanted to be together and it's hard to get together with 3,000 people and feel a belonging and a bonding and an ability to love and be transparent and sharpen each other, but you get a group of seven men or 12 ladies in a small group and it's powerful how that happens.

Uh, a senior adult man told me and I could give you hundreds if not thousands of these stories. They were in their men's small group and one of the men was kind of burdened

and he spoke up and said, "Guys, would you pray for me?" And they said, "Sure, we'll pray for you." And he said, "Well, I, I want to tithe. I have a conviction there I outta be a tither but my wife is adamantly against it. And I love her, I think she loves the Lord but we just, I'm just struggling." Those men got on their knees, put their hands on that man's shoulder and prayed for him. That's not gonna happen in a couples class with ladies present. That's not gonna happen in a class of 300. But in a small enough group where they learn to trust each other, in a small enough group where there was the bonding and the transparency, real biblical body life ministry is happening and now it's gonna take a long time to get to a mature level in your small groups and you're gonna have some small groups go bad on you, but don't give up on the structure. God uses it.

Now let me say this again. In the Pastor's Training Institute we've got a whole semester on small groups that gives you the thorough theology but boatloads of practical how-to's, the mistakes we've made, the things we've learned. Brothers, I'm just telling you, it's pure gold because it was, it was lived out on the anvil of local church experience. So if you call me and say, "Well, I don't know how to do small groups," I'm gonna say, "Did you take that class?" That's what they're there for. Take advantage of those things we're giving you. Drink in deeply of them.

Now small groups basically for us following our exegesis, our theology, what we find in the text, is to evangelize the lost, equip the saved and meet individual needs. Those are the three components that we want the laity, the body, as a team in their small group, evangelizing together, equipping, discipling, training, maturing, use your own word, one another and also there to meet individual needs. Hospitalizations. Hurtings. Sorrows. Bereavements. The small group is the first line of aid in our church. Often it, it doesn't get to the ministerial staff because the small group meets the need so well.

I'll never forget years ago I got a thought, a phone call and, uh, the leader of, of a small group said, "Uh, pastor, we're at the hospital." Um, the man's name was John. He said, not just, not a fictitious name, that's actually his name. He said, "John's had a heart attack and he's in the intensive care unit. He's stable. They think he's gonna be fine. Um, our wives are with the children and they're feeding them. They're all good. We've already prayed with him. You don't have to come. We just wanted you to know to be praying for him." You see, they were taking ownership of body life and when people do that, they feel so blessed, so encouraged. And we've had more than one report from the hospitals like, "Man, when you have somebody hurting or sick, your church cares for them, takes care of them." Well, it's because of the small group structure aided the facilitation of living out the gospel humility and love for the body that only preaching can produce. Are you seeing the connection, guys? Seeing why this is the limbs on the tree of preaching? It all goes together.

Now we do a lot of, um, leadership training but Brother David will tell you though we do formal leadership training for small groups, the most effective training is hands-on in the classroom. A small group leader will start letting a guy in his class teach some, he'll start teaching about outreach etc. etc., and then by the time David gets him in the class, they've

just gotta sharpen him up a little bit. It's like Jesus trained his disciples in the real work of ministry, and we can help you with the pitfalls and all of that and those kind of things.

We also have a lot of cyclical studies. There are foundational issues in a church that the sheep just seem to forget quickly, so we repeat certain studies. Matter of fact, I'll preach on them and I'll cycle it through my preaching from time to time, then we'll cycle the training through the small groups from time to time. Now think about it, I've got 70 small groups so when we train our and we teach our teachers the lesson every week in one form or fashion, we write the lesson, the elders write the lesson and the teachers go teach. They don't get to teach what they want. They're not called to shepherd. If you're a leader of a small group in Grace Life Church, I love and exhort you, again, you're not a pastor, you're to work under your pastors. You don't get that authority because you don't bear the responsibility for those souls your pastors do. But nevertheless, we teach them the lesson and then they teach that to their people, and we have we cycle certain basic things through over and over like biblical conflict resolution, personal evangelism, uh, local church mandates, just what's it, what does it mean to be a part of a local church, that would include a lot of our purpose and strategy statement stuff. Um, our statement of faith, first live strategic world missions. We'll look at the calendar and Brother David will say, "Hey, men, it's been three years since we hit that. We'd better hit that again." Uh, we have one we've developed from a brother's book, I forgot the brother's name, it's an excellent book called "Expository Listening." You gotta get that book. Well, we made a small group study of it and, by the way, we've got boatloads of these studies already done and ready. All you gotta do is call and we'll give it to you.

That's what Anchored in Truth is just for, it's to help you so that you don't have to reinvent all this stuff and that's a powerful thing to do. Now let, my wife said, "You're talking so fast." I'm trying to talk slower. One thing I don't want to forget about exposition is this. You remember when I told you I was an expositional idolater, and I don't mean God didn't use my preaching but I, I just, I had a hang-up that, "Oh, my goodness, I've gotta go to the next verse next week." That's all you can do because you do anything else, John MacArthur will call you and you, you will, you will not make it to heaven. Brother Jono and I have talked about this struggle kinda together. Hey, you just kinda wrestle. You just wanna be true to the text. And then this brother helped me. Do you know what this brother, do you know what this guy's name is who helped me? Martyn Lloyd-Jones. You ever heard of Martyn Lloyd-Jones? I read his book, "Preachers and Preaching," and he said, "Guys, take a break in your exposition. On Christmas take a break, preach a couple Christmas sermons. On New Year's take a break, keep, preach a couple sermons about the New Year, a new beginnings. On so-and-so take a break." I thought, "Praise God, hallelujah, I'm free!" I didn't feel that bondage that it's gotta be the next verse. Now don't, I, 27 books of the Bible I've preached through now. Don't say, "Well, pastor, it's not an exposition." Brother, an exposition can't be your idol. A true church has gotta be your goal.

So as, as you're seeing issues, maybe you're trying to develop elders in your church, stop your exposition and preach on elders from the text for about eight weeks. You got a youth issue in your church, stop your exposition and preach on that issue. Don't do that

somewhere else. Why do you think you're supposed to spend 20 hours getting ready to preach and then 20 more hours getting ready to teach your people about an issue in the church? Use your pulpit. You're killing yourself. You don't have the energy to study that many different things. And here's what you'll find out, when you're exegeting the text, it, if not in a major way at least there'll be a minor emphasis in the text that addresses what your church is dealing with right now. So you might want to pause and say, "You know what? I'm gonna pause right here. I, here's what this text teaches and I'm going to build on that theme for 2-3 weeks because we need to hear this as a body right now." Then you get that taught and you go right back to your exposition.

That's what, are you listening to me? Say amen if you're listening? I call that local church exposition and there is no other kind. Almost every book of the New Testament is addressed to a local church. It's local church exposition. Your job isn't to feed the world, your job is to grow one church. So have the church in your heart, that's you, remember that's your biblical theology, the centrality of the church, and, and try to find ways to address the practical issues that are at hand at that moment as you go through books of the Bible or stop and address it as you go along. Now you don't want to get hung-up there too long obviously but that will take a great burden off of you of doing all these stuff outside your pulpit to teach and admonish and correct things. Use the pulpit.

When you look at Paul's letters to these churches, what does he do? He addresses the issues. "Men, you outta stop doing this. Ladies, get in line over here. You're acting like heathen or Gentile ladies." That's Timothy. "Watch those silly women now. Now you gonna have elders, here's the..." He just deals with the issues at hand. Do it in your exposition and occasionally, not all the time, verse by verse, chapter by chapter should be the mainstay of the pulpit but from time to time interject something. All right, that's for, see, I've already left that point, shouldn't have gone back.

All right, number 2. We're, we're on the limbs of the tree, the structures and strategies, small group every member ministry through small groups and I don't wanna say this, I don't care if you hadn't got started, I understand that, I don't care if it's not going hard at all, I understand that but I want you to hear what I'm about to say. I'm not here to sell anybody anything. I'm not here to impress anybody. If you don't have a heart, pastor, to glorify God, of striving toward every member ministry in your church, then you cannot be a part of the Anchored in Truth partnership. You cannot be. That's foundational. You don't have to do it just like us but if that's not your heart, if you think you're gonna just preach, just kinda barely keep everything else going and that's, you're gonna call that church life, then you don't belong in our fellowship. I don't mean that ugly but I'd ask you to have a heart for building the church up and striving toward every member ministry, and I don't, I don't know any other way to do that than through a small group. Is that fair enough, brothers?

2. Under structures and strategies: personalized strategic world missions. Now we're using the word personalized in contrast to the word institutionalized. Baptists historically have had an institutionalized approach. You throw missions money at a distant institution and you call that your missions work. Personalized is what you experience in the True

Church Conference. The, we know, Max, we just talked to Max. We know him personally. We go do work with him personally. And all these other missionaries. And all of our small groups have two, to four, five missionaries they adopt and personally get to know them and email them, and pray for them, and many of them go on the mission journeys to help them.

So it's very personal. Do you know what happens? They get alive with the passion to reach the world when they get to personally know the mission workers. So we strive for personalized versus an institutionalized approach, and we mean a biblically personalized and a biblically strategic. What we mean by biblically strategic and I don't wanna be ugly spiritually about this and, but we, we don't have, we don't do anything like puppets for Jesus. We don't do skits for Jesus, basketball for Jesus. We preach the word, we win the lost, we establish local New Testament churches and then we do it again. That's all we do. That's biblically strategic because that's all you find in the New Testament. That's it. Now let's be kind to brothers who may do these other ministries, okay? Let's don't beat them up but for me I'm putting my money on what's thoroughly revealed in Scripture.

There's only one command that, um, I know is given in five books of the New Testament, Matthew, Mark, Luke, John and Acts, and that's go into all the world. It's worded different ways but in Matthew, Mark, Luke, John and Acts we have go into all the world and make disciples, preach to all the nations, you shall be my witnesses to the uttermost parts of the world, and on and on we could go. So we cannot put second what seems like God puts first. Grace Life Church of the Shoals does not have a world missions program. Grace Life Church of the Shoals exists for missions if you biblically define missions. But here's my challenge to you: let's all strive to be a decent enough biblical model that we can take what we are to the world and not apologize for it. Have you noticed, guys, when you get on the mission field a lot of what I do on the mission field is tear down what a lot of American churches have taken over there. Brother Barry, see it all the time, don't we? The, we take every fad and gimmick in the world instead of the simple, solid, biblical structures of true missions.

So just take what we're learning and what we are and let's reproduce it, and, and the, the one aspect of a mature church is reproduction and obviously the New Testament model and I've got a lot of work on this and it's absolutely amazing how much is there on this, how Paul absolutely, should I say, required probably required, at least expected all those new churches to join with him in cooperation to help him plant still more churches. It's local churches working with local churches and it's all backed up to Jerusalem and to Antioch, the mother churches, and that's kind of our vision, that if you've been at it for decades and God has blessed it, then you should start, you should be, have a vision for leading and helping the coordination of other local churches so together we can get the job done because that... Now we don't have apostles, that'd make it easy. Apostles just walk in and say, "You church, do this. You church. No, I want this church to do this. I need this church to give money," whatever it is. But we do have Jerusalems and Antiochs, that's churches who can serve as overseers and directors of that work.

Piper says that missions exist because worship doesn't. I'm gonna give you a Noblit addendum to that. Worship to be proper has to be worship in the context of local churches. He's right, I agree 100%, missions exist because we need worshipers of God everywhere but God says, "I want worshipers to be organized into local churches and function according to My dictates." So we don't get to just have entrepreneurial worshipers out there. No, we worship the way he wants to be worshiped by establishing local churches and becoming biblically healthy local churches.

3. Is what I call home life discipleship. It's the third spoke in the wheel. Now, I, I don't want to spend much time here but Deuteronomy 6:4-7, actually Deuteronomy 4:7, is, is the verse that I think gives us the best insight on how the godly home exercises or lives out discipleship within the home. So what does he say there, he says in verse 7, "You shall teach them diligently to your sons and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up." To me that means as you're going about your daily home life, be real. Be real about your love for Christ. Be real about your love for the truth and throw it out there and talk. I'm not talking about rigidly and legalistically. Look, here's what I'd like to say, the truths taught from the pulpit of your church, the truths taught in your small groups every week should be taken home by the fathers and the mothers and should slosh over in everyday home life so that you're talking about the biblical truth your pastor has told you that, or taught you that week. And you know what that'll do? That'll make your kids understand, "Man, our parents honor our pastors. They listen and when we get home we talk about those things." And not just Sunday, he didn't say a particular day of the week, he just says when you walk by the way, when you lie down and when you rise up, just as you're going about your daily life.

So, so we see that there needs to be the church as the center of your home life, the truths taught then as you live out Monday through Saturday, there's just a rumination and a sloshing over of those truths in the home. I'm not against highly structured family altars, I've just never seen them do very well. I hope you prove me wrong. I hope you do them and they're wonderful. Forty years, 40 years of observation and what I've seen is the families that are not formal about it, they're not real structured about it but it's just real, it just sloshes over, they seem to have the godliest kids. But I have seen a lot of families, now to be honest there are also homeschool Nazis and other stuff, and they'd have this strict, "Boy, at this time we sit down and we, we have the word, we have family worship, then at this time it's over." You know what the kids learn to do? "Let's get this over with. Get this over with, and after I get outta here, I'm done with this." But when it just comes out of the life of the home sloshing over on what the parents learned in the church, it just seems to work better.

Now there's no guarantee here, okay? Your discipline, as good as it is, don't misunderstand me, I, I, my grandkids are homeschooled and I get, we love it, but we don't worship it, it's not an idol. Your strictness about homeschooling and teaching and family altars, your strictness doesn't convert your child, the gospel does. The gospel does. Brother Matt, my Senior Associate Pastor, we talk about it all the time. We say, man, when we look at our kids through these years, Matt's been here practically his whole life,

it just seems like the kids that do better are families that just didn't make a real strict big deal but they really love Jesus.

You see, I believe in church integrated families. Your family centers itself in the church and you take the church's truth home with you and it goes from that. By the way, dads are not pastors of their home. Your pastor is the pastor of your home. He's the pastor of you. He's the pastor of momma. He's the pastor of the kids. Now I understand that's a figure of speech, the father is the head of the household. I get that but there's some guys out there that they, what they mean is, "I'm as much a pastor as the guy that the church called to be the pastor." Wrong. You need to go home and you need to quote your pastor. You need to make sure your family knows God's put him in a position to lead us and disciple us and teach us, and we don't worship him but he's God's tool and we're gonna take what our pastor teaches and we're gonna talk about it in the home. My main point here is there's no mature body life, there's no mature local church if it's not real in the homes. Amen? Home life discipleship.

Now this is not one of the spokes in the wheel. The spokes in my wheel connect to the hub. Guys, can you put that up real quick one more time? Of course, you know the hub drives everything, everything depends on the hub. You might say, "Man, we started with a tree and now we're on a wheel. Where else are we going?" Who knows. The hub of the wheel is preaching the word. That's, that's, that drives everything. One of the spokes, the right spoke, every member ministry through small groups. The left, um, spoke, um, personalized strategic world missions. We got local church centered missions there, same concept. And then the other spoke is home life discipleship. Here, here's what I would only charge you. Now I'm, I'm talking with a 40 year record here: until you get those right, don't do anything else. I mean, week in and week out as you preach, you keep throwing out, "Hey, that's why we're gonna do personalized strategic world missions. Hadn't really got there yet but I want y'all to know we're gonna do personalized strategic world." And then the next week you're preaching the text, "By the way, this text alludes to this. That's why we teach every member ministry through small groups. I know you don't get all that yet and we're gonna be working on that, it's gonna take years actually but we're gonna have effective body life ministry through small groups." That's what I've done in this pulpit. I've poured it out, poured it out and poured it out and my people couldn't quote the words because we don't worry about quoting the words but they live the reality. Somebody had asked me about the, "All your people five point Calvinists?" I thought they couldn't describe to you the five points of Calvinism but if you start studying the Bible with them, they believe them basically. They get it. They get the truth.

All right now, number 4 here, back to the tree. We're on the, the limbs of the tree and the fourth aspect, you might say the fourth primary limb in this tree of a healthy biblical church is a sound membership process. A sound membership process. Now just as I told you earlier, our small groups take ownership of personally being involved with missionaries so also the small groups take the leadership in the membership process. Here's my thing, guys: if you get small groups biblically right, you can get everything right. Are you hearing me? Now it's gonna take some time. Make it simple on yourself, preach the word in the power of the Spirit the best you know how, develop small groups,

it may take a long time, develop personalized strategic world missions, and don't do anything else until those are right. When you get those right, then do something else. I'm on 41 years and I'm still working on those. Amen?

But it really makes church easy, in a way, does it not? "Oh, here's the new thing. You gotta have this women's thing." I say, our women's thing are our women's small groups. "Oh, we gotta have this men's." Our men's ministries are men's small groups. We do other things but it's out of the small group. You get that right, everything else is pretty much downhill. Now I know some of you, your church is quite small, you, you can't have 70 small groups but you can start preaching and if, if, if I could just really twist your arm, preach the word in the power of the Spirit, identify two, four, five, seven men that you think might be elder material, you're not sure yet, and you meet with them one morning a week just study the word together and keep selling them the vision, and Brother Jono, and when you start to organize your small groups, those are your small group leaders. You see, you've been with them. You pour your heart into a few key men, organize and develop small groups, you begin to develop personalized strategic world missions, you preach the word in the power of the Spirit, and I'm telling you if your heart's right and the Spirit's empowering you, you'll build a true church.

Sound membership process. It, it, it grows out of, that's number 4 of the trunk on the tree of structures, it grows out of small groups. The key that unlocks the door to having a true regenerate membership is a biblical understanding of conversion. I got a call and I've gotten a number of calls like this from a pastor years ago and it really shocked me. It shocked me and I answered the phone and I was talking to this pastor and we, we were just bonding, he believed like I believe and that's back when that didn't happen a whole lot, to be honest, and he said, "You're really trying to build a regenerate membership." I thought, "Huh?" But honestly, Brother Jono, am I exaggerating? In the majority of Baptist churches it's understood a huge chunk of our membership is lost but here's what they'll say, "But at least that'll help us keep a tab on them, maybe they'll come and maybe they'll get saved." No, you're supposed to discipline those people. You can't add to God's church what God hasn't added to God's church. Brothers, if you're struggling with should I have a regenerate membership, you're in kindergarten. I'm not saying have you got it done yet. That's hard. But in your heart have you, brother, now you must have, how are you gonna live out biblical ministry that requires the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit and lots of time and blood, sweat and tears with unregenerate people? You can't get goats to be sheep. It's abhorrent.

That was one of the most important journeys God put me on. We, we were exercising church discipline here and we were having discipline about everybody who joined and I thought, "Lord, what is wrong? We baptized 280 people last year." It's almost like God said, "Well, that's a start what is wrong. You didn't know if those people were saved." And I didn't. Now this was a long long time ago but I thought, "We're disciplining all these people." And God said, "Well," not literally, not audibly, louder than that, he said, "You don't understand conversion." Well, I actually I did, I was troubled already that people were just going through the motions and I began to teach, I began to, and I probably there was a two year time where I insatiably read Dalimore on Whitefield,

Spurgeon on soul-winning, just all the old authors, Puritan fathers, our Baptist theologians, and I realized what we're calling conversion is not what they called conversion. What we're calling soul-winning is not what they called soul-winning. What we're calling evidences of qualification of the new birth and therefore, uh, allowed into church membership, they wouldn't define it that way and I started reteaching our people and redefining it and we slowed things down on the member, membership process. And then for at least a two year period I wouldn't let my staff counsel with anyone who wanted to come for baptism. You know why? I needed to learn again what conversion looked like. I needed to learn again. And so we changed our mindset to say what biblically speaking does conversion look like?

Let me spend a, um, a little time on Romans 10:14-17, familiar passage of Scripture, "How then will they call on Him in whom they have not believed? How will they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how will they hear without a preacher? How will they preach unless they are sent? Just as it is written, 'How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news of good things!'" Verse, um, 16, "However, they did not all heed the good news; for Isaiah says, 'Lord, who has believed our report?'" Verse 17, I'll just kind of anchor down here, "Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ." Now preaching here when he talks about preaching is an active tense, it means continual preaching. Verse 17, preaching of what? The word about Christ, the word that proclaims and, and, and reveals Christ, that's the Scriptures in general. But also hearing, faith comes by hearing. That's a continual action. Brothers, the Bible doesn't teach that the majority of the time you hear one simple three minute gospel presentation and, boom, you get saved. Typically it's hearing, hearing preaching, hearing preaching, hearing preaching, hearing before you can identify evidences of the true new birth.

Now here's what I, I have guys who oppose me on this and I'll just ask this simple question: do you faithfully practice church discipline in your church? "Well, no, I don't, you know, haven't got that done." Do that for about five years and call me back on the doctrine of conversion. You, and I mean, I'm not talking about being FBI agency and finding out what church members might secretly be struggling with sin, we all are secretly struggling with sin, I'm talking about guys with brazen, open, rebellious, sinful lifestyles. They'll have so many of those to deal with, they'll come back and say these people can't be saved. That's what they'll do and then they'll realize, like Jeff Noblit had to realize, I need to get the doctrine of conversion down right.

So it's preaching the word continually, hearing the word continually and somewhere in that time God begins to birth people in the kingdom of God. Where there is sound preaching and sound hearing, that means the Spirit's enabling it, God will manifest his elect by manifesting repentance and faith in them. You believe that? No, no, no, do you believe that, that God will use his word to convert his elect? You see, the problem with most churches is they don't believe in the Holy Spirit. They think it's their cleverness that draws people instead of God's Spirit through the preached word. I'm gonna tell you, if you get them any other way than that, you've got a problem on your hands, but if they come through the Spirit of God convicting them to repentance and faith, then you've got great moldable clay you can work with to biblically mold into a healthy church.

Now we have a membership class. I, I put one together years ago, Brother Matt did a wonderful job of redoing it awhile back and you can have it and he can help you with anything you don't understand about it, and that's important but, but to be honest, I think the membership class at best might be, let's say 25% of the process but sitting under the preaching of the word is probably 75-80% of the process of us identifying is this person really supposed to be one of us. Um, I mean, Brother Matt, after they've sat under the preaching of the word for six months and hung out with our people, they're either moving away from us or coming to us. You hear what I'm saying? Now that's only true if you've got a decently healthy church. The average evangelical or Baptist church has as many unregenerate people as regenerate people so pagans can feel comfortable, but once, Brother Jono, God gets us, I'm not talking about perfect, none of us are, but to a good level of maturity, then people walk in and if they're a sheep they'll like it because most of your folks are sheep, but if they're a goat, they'll put it on for awhile but they'll, they'll kind of remove themselves from the process. So we believe a guy ought to come for months before he even goes into the membership class because sitting under the word is better to assimilate and identify if he's truly one God's adding versus our class.

Um, I want to say just a little bit about the word "call" in our text. It's used twice, how will they call upon them in whom they've not believed, um, well, and then there's the phrase in this context and I had to look it up, "Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved." I spent a lot of time on there. It's an aorist subjunctive middle which almost means nothing to me, but that's what it is. Uh, but I consulted on a lot of scholars and they said though it's an aorist tense it is a continuum. It, it's kinda like looking, uh, at a parade from a helicopter. It's a, it's a long continuous thing though you can only look at one point at a time. So this calling on the Lord has a continuum element to it so the idea is conversion is that you become one who calls on the name of the Lord. It's not a one-time hoop jump. It's a changed heart and a changed perspective about your sin, depravity, offensiveness before God and your new growing joy and peace that Christ saves. I'm continually now looking to him and as I learn what the Bible teaches about prophets, priests and kings, I begin to learn and treasure and joy in looking to him, calling on him as my only true prophet, that he only has wisdom to give me from his word, I'm just starting to love my prophet's word. He, Jesus, is my prophet. And then as I learn what the Bible says about the priest, he mediates and connects me to God, I'm learning to be one who calls on him as the only one who can mediate and keep me connected to the Father. He did it at one time certainly but it continues on. And also as I learn that he's king, I gladly and joyously have at least the germ in me to want to bow to this king and honor this king. I'm one now who calls on him as my prophet, priest and king.

Now a new convert is not gonna understand that but as they learn the Scriptures and sit under preaching, as the concepts come out their heart identifies with it and you're looking for that evidence they are one who now is looking to the Lord. Now certainly conversion there is a one-time calling, if you will, where you begin the moment of belief, justification is immediate and secured, but the conversion process is not some superstitious ritual or some mantra you repeat. That's decisionism, or easy-believism. So when converted you do not just place your faith in Christ, you became a faither in Christ.

When you're saved you didn't just repent of sin, you became a repenter of sin. Conversion is not a mathematical formula where if you plug in the right numbers, poof, you get the right result. Justification is secured immediately but the evidence of true conversion is not your justification, it's that beginning of sanctification as one who calls on the name of the Lord.

We have to remind ourselves if you give people any ironclad steps, the flesh can easily counterfeit and mimic that, but if over time under the word messing it up with your true Christians, they're drawn, you see a humility, there's witness of a, awareness of sin and a burden over their, their deep offensiveness to God and there's a growing treasuring and hope and resting that Christ is my Savior, then you're getting ready to start talking about baptism. You're not gonna have a healthy church without a good biblical understanding of conversion. The key evidence or one key evidence is humility and conviction about our sinful condition.

I remember in the months after I was converted, I talked so much about what a wretch I was and what a vile wicked sinner. I felt that. I felt it. My Sunday school teachers in my Baptist church, bless their hearts, they meant well, rebuked me and said, "Stop doing that. You're not that bad." I said, "I am that bad. You don't understand. I got a glimpse of this holy God. I know what I am!" Are you listening? Brothers, as you preach the text, you must intentionally regularly preach a hearty doctrine or a hearty message on the doctrine of sin and depravity and man's fallen offensiveness to a holy God because then the regenerate will joy and treasure Christ for saving such wretches like us. And, and when they've got that kind of gospel humility, you can mold them in anything. They're willing to do what the Bible says.

So a key evidence is that humility and that conviction about their sinful condition. They are now those who call on the Lord daily for grace and mercy. One of my prayers and I say it to my people all the time, when I think about who I am and how prone I am to falting and shortcomings, I just have to crawl, I call out, I call on the name of the Lord and I call out and I say, "Lord, if it's not Christ and if You don't save me, I'm sunk." Now I don't say that like I don't think he saved me, I just call. Do you do that? Am I the only oddball in here? How can you know your sin and not continually call on Christ and so, "Help me, Lord Christ." And by the way, are you listening? He's mighty to save. Woo! He's mighty to save. He, he, he don't save us by the amount, number of times you call on him, you call on him in a number of times because you believe that he saved you so well. Oh me, if I don't stay with my notes, we'll never get done. Yeah, we're just now getting off the runway, aren't we?

We must urge all people everywhere to repent and believe and encourage them that if they will repent and believe, God will save them, okay? Not talking about a works salvation here. All people, everybody, that's my form of Calvinism, preach to everyone and ever say, "If you'll repent and believe you'll be saved." But we've got to slow down before receiving them as members. There's, those are two different things. As, brother, we use this little book on children's conversion and he makes this statement, "Can a young child be genuinely saved?" He says, yes, but it's really hard to know if they were

genuinely saved and we need to pull back and wait. I don't have time to go here. Let me go on.

Another key evidence, I talk about conviction of sin but the other key evidence is this agape love that comes in, the Holy Spirit brings this agape. Now I'm not a Greek scholar but I think you would find that agape is almost only used for that unique special love only the Holy Spirit puts in Christians. That's why it's not used among the Greeks. It was, it was coined by the apostles to mark out the unique special love God put in us, and this unique special love has two main objects that are really one, and that is it's Christ and his church. Christ and his church. When God saves you, there will be a growing love – now listen – for the Lord Jesus Christ and for Christ's true church. Not church members. Not congregations. Lot of false believers in those unfortunately. But when you get around real believers, you just love them. That's what makes a church and, and, like Brother Jono said last night, I'm pastoring the sweetest, most united, most peaceful, gracious people because we finally got to where most of us are really converted and God's put a supernatural love in our hearts for one another that you just can't even verbalize. And you know why some of you look at me like a calf at a new gate right now? Because you've never seen that. You've seen little glimpses of it but you've never seen a church with a strong majority are truly regenerate. You took a church, Brother Sunny, not everybody but that's why a lot of them leave us because the love's not there for us. Some God moves, we understand that, but that's why a lot leave us and that's God to building his church. That's not easy but that's what the Lord does.

So the new love for God and a new love for his church. Jesus said in John 8:42, "If God were your Father, you would love Me," is that not simple? You can span that out, "If God were your Father, you would love His church too." How can you love Jesus and he went to the cross and bore the wrath of holy God, bore the separation of God that he'd never known, bore the, the gruesome, offensive burden of our sins, took it all on him, tasted death for the church. You see, if your theology is not right, you're not getting it right now. He didn't die sloppy. He died for specific ones and he fulfilled perfectly his goal for that elect church and how could you love him and not love the ones he gave so much in love for? You see, it's gonna be there. I'm not saying it's matured but like I tell, I learned this from some Puritan writer, at least the germ of that love will be there, okay? So be careful judging people. We're all in a journey here.

So being a true biblically, spiritually healthy church is very important obviously. If one is a true convert, they're gonna be drawn to sound preaching and true local church fellowship in contrast to being drawn to what John MacArthur calls the non-churches that are so worldly and mildly biblical you can't really call them a church anymore. So when you worry about, "Oh my goodness, we might all... because they're gonna be drawn by this game this church is playing, these shenanigans, this, and boy, down the street they got the biggest show on earth on Sunday." And you're worried, "Oh my goodness, how we gonna keep?" Look, the sheep will be drawn to the preaching of the word in the power of the Spirit and the fellowship of true Christians. You see, your church is a goat repeller. What it is. If it's true. Brother Jono, isn't that true? You don't have those goofballs joining your church. They walk by Jono's and say, "I ain't going in there. He,

he'll call my sin out and preach the word to me." I'm worse than you, brother. They all hate me.

Let's go to the fruit and I've got maybe 10 minutes, all right? Let's go to the fruit. That's the, the leaves on the tree, the, the final culmination. The pinnacle priority element, can I say it that way? The pentacle final proof that you're a true church and that Christ is being glorified through your church is this fruit. John 13:35, "all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another." That's agape. That's that unique Holy Spirit placed love, Holy Spirit preaching of the word matured love that only true saints of God share together. That kind of love. It, it's a love the world knows nothing about. Jesus prayed in John 17 that we would have unity that would prove to the world we're his disciples. So he says, "When you love with that unique special love only Christians have, and when you have the unity that only unique truly Christians can have because they have that love, the world will look on that and they'll know you're My disciples," because the world can't do that. The world says, "Look at the strife and divisions and hatred and disunity and you've got people from all walks of life and all backgrounds yet they love each other. How does that happen? Your God is worthy of all honor and dignity because nobody can do that. We've never seen that before."

This is a powerful statement, this love, this unique special. Now, now, now, see, when I was a young Christian, young pastor, I thought this love meant I take the love I knew as a lost man, this worldly concept of love, and just work at it real hard in the church. Uh, uh, no. This is a new love. It's Spirit-wrought, it's Bible-defined and it's Spirit-empowered to be lived out.

We're to, Ephesians 4:15 and 16, "speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him," and I would say the highest example of the true love is confrontation of the truth one another, when we're willing to confront one another in love or rather confront one another in truth wrapped in love. He says in Ephesians 4:16, "from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love." In verse 15 "grow up in all aspects," in verse 16, but do it in love. Our continued growth, our Christian maturity requires the brethren confronting one another with the truth. That's love the world can't understand but the tenor and tone of our confrontation must be love and the motivation for the confrontation must be love. We need truth encouragement, truth exhortation, truth correction in our body life, all driven by and all wrapped in this new agape love the Spirit's put in us for one another. This love, this confrontation of truth one to another is the key to show to others that we're the real deal.

Real quick and, man, I'm leaving some stuff out. Three key aspects of confrontational love that's done in such a way that the world is, marvels over and causes the world to praise our God for the unique and wonderful thing that his, that this church is. Three confrontational aspects are these. 1. A word about biblical counseling. Biblical counseling versus psychology or so-called Christian psychology. Suffice it to say the word "counseling," the word "nouthetic," uh, that I guess J. Adams kinda coined for us,

nouthetic counseling it's called, is taken from the Greek word because it's usually, well, it's translated in many ways. It's translated counsel, admonish, correct, instruct, but the point is the word "nouthetic" is so pregnant with meaning there's not one English word that can define it so you need actually a listing of things. So when we counsel biblically, you can't just say counsel, there's more to it than that.

So when we have agape love giving us a special love for each other and so we are regularly lovingly confronting one another with the truth to grow up in all aspects of the him, here's what it should look like, here's how I'm defining nouthetic or biblical counseling. 1. There's gotta be a true concern, a loving concern for the person. It's a loving concern based on truth. Now here's the way the concern should outline itself. The highest part of your concern is for the glory of God. If a brother's in sin and you're counseling him, your basic concern is they're not able to glorify God in this sin, I want God glorified. That's your major concern. The second part of the concern is, the second and most important thing is, um, or rather, it, or no, it's the good of the church. The church is more important than you. Are you with me? And so if there's undealt with sin or some issue in a brother's life, maybe it's not sin, he just needs help and you're counseling from the word because if he's not all or he or she ought to be, the body's gonna suffer. So the good of the church is on the line when a member is suffering. Remember if one member suffers they all suffer? So confronting them with the truth. I don't mean confronting in a harsh, even correction way all the time, just bringing the truth to bear. Remember, it's gotta be wrapped in love, that means tone, that means tenor, that means the way we select our words. But the third aspect of our concern is good for that individual Christian. We are concerned about them too but only in this order: the glory of God, the good of the church and their good.

Now the second part of nouthetic or biblical counseling to me would be correction. You're basically saying, "Okay, here we are. Here's the way you're thinking. Here's the way you're looking at this, or here's the way you're behaving but here's what the Bible says. So you've got to repent of the way you're thinking or the way you're looking at this or the way you're behaving, and start replacing that with what the Bible says." That's biblical counseling, all right? Correction from the word of God. Here's where you are and here's what the word says, here's how you need to change.

Thirdly is accountability. Accountability. Paul said 2 Thessalonians 3:14, "If anyone does not obey our instruction in this letter, take special note of that person and do not associate with him," that's an element of accountability, actually that's the last of a discipline too, but principle of accountability is there, "so that he will be put to shame." Lot to say there, we don't have time to say it. Verse 15, "Yet do not regard him as an enemy, but admonish him," that's nouthetic, that's the root word nouthetic there, admonish, "but admonish him as a brother." What's it mean? Have a kindness. Look, here's what we say. If your, if your, if your church is maturing and brothers are learning to confront and correct each other by the word, we do it with great compassion and patience if they show the slightest step of being a repentant. Not, not arriving but they're, they're willing to be a fighter here. They're willing to strive toward it. You know, we're gonna put our arms around them and we're gonna struggle with them, amen?

All right, the fourth step in nouthetic counseling, let's see, we've got genuine loving concern, we've got correction, we're gonna hold them accountable for what the word told them to change, and then if after great patience and longsuffering and care they're not willing to even try, then there's church discipline. Listen to me: there is no Bible Christian counseling without church discipline. It aggravates me to see the academics chop these up into separate, separate disciplines. You cannot separate biblical counseling from church discipline because if they're, if they're clearly – now listen to me – unwilling to even try, but I'm saying they're struggling. Hey, if they're struggling put your arms around them and struggle with them, help them. But if they, Brother Jono, if they walk out the door and bow their neck, "I'm gonna live this way, I don't care." You've been counseling now it comes to discipline. They're to be two are to go, three are to go, tell it to the church, they won't repent, remove them. You see, counseling has no power to it if it's not backed up by discipline. Are you with me, church?

All right, a word about conflict resolution. I don't have time for a word about conflict resolution but just real quick, 2 Timothy, and I'm just picking out one little thing of 100. In 2 Timothy 3:3, we have the listing of these fruits of the flesh, if you want to call it that. They are the antithesis of the fruits of the Spirit and there's one here that jumps out to me so strong and that's the fruit of irreconcilable. Irreconcilable. That's one of the fruits of the old man, the lost man, the flesh. The word "irreconcilable" literally means "truce-breaker or covenant-breaker." One scholar says it literally means "without libation" and the point was in the old world when you made a, an agreement to come together and be reconciled, you poured out a libation to seal the covenant of unity. So this is a brother that says, "I will not have a covenant. I'll not pour out the libation. I'll not be reconciled."

Well, that's conflict. Wouldn't you say that's conflict? We're talking about conflict resolution. So he's refusing to be reconciled. Well, in the context of 2 Timothy 3, we see two other things I want to bring out. The Bible lists along with these other vices or, or fruits of the flesh, the phrase "a lover of self." He's proving by his unwillingness to reconcile with his brother or sister in Christ that he just really loves himself. Then after he says irreconcilable, another truth comes out, 2 Timothy 3:5, holding to a form of godliness. It's the idea if he has the, the, the shell but not the substance of true Christianity. That's not always true but that's a general truth of those who adamantly, well, I'll put it this way, it's simply impossible, it's simply impossible for brothers in a local church who are indwelt and filled by the Holy Spirit to be irreconcilable. Impossible. And we've deal with a little bit of this in an Anchored in Truth family. Here's what I want to say. If there's a division in your church and you call on us to help you mediate it and good godly men, or maybe in a church your elders come to mediate the problem and they say, "Well, you've got these three sins and you've got these one sins, y'all deal with those sins and y'all reconcile and you bow our neck and said I'll not be reconciled," then I can't believe you belong to Christ, well, if God lets you go very long in that. You're supposed to lay down your life for your brother. Why can't you get over your petty disagreement and just eat it for the sake of God and the church?

What did he say in 1 Corinthians? Paul said, "Why you brothers going to, to the secular courts when you have a disagreement?" He said, "Why don't you bring it to the saints and let them mediate it? They have the mind of Christ. They know better than the ungodly, unregenerate know. Why would you go to an unregenerate judge and ask him to, to, to bring, to work out a mediation between two brothers who have the Spirit of God?" So let the church, the elders, intervene there and work out a resolution. We had a man in our church who was a businessman and he had an employee and I don't know all the details, but the employee was really responsible for him losing a lot of money and he did what the Bible says, he brought it to the elders and we looked at the situation and we thought the boy was, was clearly guilty and he just kinda bowed up. But that business owner said, "I'm not gonna sue him. I'm not gonna take him to church. I'm gonna forgive the loss and we're gonna go on." And that businessman is still a faithful, serving, tithing member of our church. Do you know why? Because he's not irreconcilable.

It's impossible for true Christian brothers to go on in, in, in an irreconcilable spirit. Here's what I'm saying about how these link together. So whether it's biblical counseling or conflict resolution, what happens when a brother resists the, the mediation to be reconciled within the local church? Then discipline should take place. They're to be brought before the church ultimately and removed for refusing to reconcile. So we see these always go together. These should never be separated into three separate things. It's all one thing for the glory of God and the good of the church.

So if there has been proper mediation in the conflict, and those leading the mediation propose a biblical remediation, and one or both of the parties refuse reconciliation then that's an abomination and there should be discipline.

I'm gonna mention these and we're done. A word about church discipline. Six primary purposes of church discipline is to repair God's reputation, that's the most important one. "Well, you know, we discipline people to, to restore them back." Not first. You discipline people because they're dishonoring God by their sin. Firstly, restore God's reputation. We saw this with David, your sins give an occasion for the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme. God cares about his reputation. You know, he, God's a fanatic about his own glory so if we are willingly, openly, habitually dishonoring him, it's got to be corrected, that means in an outward way. So much more to say there.

2. To restore a sheep to the fold. We are going out with a heart to restore them if at all possible. Matthew 18:18-20, Corinthian example in 1 Corinthians 5.

3. To rescue a sheep from ruin. The Bible says the wages of sin is death. If this brother goes on in sin, he's gonna destroy himself, he may bring death to his family, he may bring death to his occupation. We're saving this brother from ruin when we confront him and try to bring him back.

4. To remove a false sheep from the church. 1 John 2:19, "They went out from us, but they were not really of us; for if they had been of us, they would have remained with us." If God has changed them and given them the same Holy Spirit we have, they'll want to be

with us. So the steps of church discipline when a person will not be reconciled and return to the church, we have no conclusion other than they're not God's. They went out from us because it was that they really were never of us, what the text says.

5. It renews sanctification among the faithful sheep. In two places in the New Testament the Bible talks about great fear came upon the congregation after discipline was administered. Acts 5:11; 1 Timothy 5:20. And I've had people say, "Man, I don't know about that down there. They'll, they'll bring me before the church. I'm afraid that'll happen." Well, that's good. You ought to be afraid. That, that, that concern, um, John MacArthur said one time, if you have a, if you, if you build a church where you deal with each other's sins, then you'll have church members joining your church who want their sins dealt with. That's pretty good, isn't it? You see, you'll draw the right people. Now look, this is a, whenever there's church discipline it's got to be carried out with absolute utmost confidentiality. It's never talked about. You don't spread it around. And if you're confronting someone with sin and you start talking about it, we'll discipline you before the person in sin because you're damaging the body more by your gossiping about it than his sin is damaging the body. So you make a tenacious commitment that it's gotta be utmost private unless it becomes an open scandal and everybody in the church and the world knows it, then it's gotta be dealt with openly obviously, or if he doesn't repent, finally it becomes an open sin brought before the church.

6. To repel the wolf at the door. The repel the wolf at the door. When you be or known or in your community as loving one another with a genuine deep love, loving each other so much that you'd correct each other with the word, the people who don't want that, the wolves are not gonna want in your church. In Acts 5, after Ananias and Sapphira were dealt with, after the discipline case of Ananias and Sapphira, in Acts 5:13 the Bible says, "But none of the rest dared to associate with them; however, the people held them in high esteem." Who is "none of the rest" that went away, they wouldn't associate with them? It was folks who were just kinda hanging out with the gathering of the church, some of the meetings of the church but they weren't saved yet. They were repelled away and God does that sometimes.

You know, for over 20 years now Grace Life Church of the Shoals has experienced a sweet unity and a sweet peace that is really indescribable. You have to experience it to get it but that was after the first 20 years of cycles of turmoil and division and strife and ugliness. But nothing has been more important to build the love and unity of our body than the faithful practice, though often imperfect, but the faithful practice of church discipline. Church discipline is a filter on the front door. Folks won't come in who really aren't supposed to be there once you're known as a church that functions in this. It's a sifter on the back door of the church. You know, sifter holds the good in, let's the stuff go through that you don't need. So if you start practicing church discipline, you'll lose the right people and you'll hold the right people but it's a light on the main floor. In other words, the light, what does light do? It purifies. It cleanses. It builds up and aids the sanctification of the church as a whole.

Now I know you're tired. I've gone too long but get this last thing. The pinnacle fruit of a local church and the pinnacle expression of love in a local church is when they exercise this loving confrontation, loving confrontation with the truth and all the parties in love are humble and thankful for it and keep growing together, and then you come full circle to the first statement on our biblical theology, a priority of the glory of God, and when your church is doing that, God gets the most glory through your church. Now we never get done, we're always learning and growing and repenting, but let's be in the race together to build true churches that live out Christianity in such a way that God gets the glory.