

The Unique Gifts the Victor Distributes

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Let's go back to Ephesians this evening and continue on the theme that the apostle has been teaching to the church at Ephesus, and of course by the fact that this is part of divine Scripture and instruction to all of us as we come to one verse as he shifts gears a little bit about how the Victor gives these gifts to the church for our continued service in building this kingdom that we get to be a part of and get to be involved in until he returns.

Now we come to verse 11 of Ephesians 4 and he continues by saying, "And," conjunctive word connecting it to all he has been saying so far,

11 And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers,

So let's stop right there. I want to spend a good deal of time and expand on the foundation of this verse because we live in a day when there is a lot of, I think, confusion and misinformation and quite frankly, false doctrine about these offices of ministry that are gifts of God to the church.

Now when somebody gives you a gift, it's intended to be a blessing and a benefit to you, especially if it cost them something. I vividly remember as a young boy my parents, my mom in particular, really sacrificing to get me some nice things at Christmas when we probably couldn't afford them, but she found a way to make sure we got them and so it is with our Christ. He went to great cost to leave the glories of heaven where he was worshiped and honored as Lord and God, and come down here where he would be spit upon and hated and ridiculed. And I can't imagine being God Incarnate as he walked through the regions of Cana, of Galilee, and taught and preached, and time after time after time, the religious authorities of the day would scorn him and spin and twist everything he taught and everything he said to put him in the worst possible light with the people of his day, and there he was, the Savior, God Incarnate, sent to die for them. He came at great cost and, of course, the greatest cost of hanging on a cross and there are mysteries there and glories there and holiness there that is almost too holy to trod upon where God the Father cursed and poured out the retribution we deserve on God the Son, Jesus Christ, when God turned his back on the Son, despising our shame. Great great cost so that he might reclaim what was his and give these gifts.

So Christ has saved us by his merit and his work. We are those called out ones. We talked about that. The word "church" is "ekklesia," it means "called out ones." That's simply its definition. These called out ones, called out from everything of the world being the centerpiece of your life and the local church is now the centerpiece of your life. It's not that you can't be involved in other organizations, it's just that's not where you fit like you fit in God's church. Other things may come and go but you stay rock solid to the church. God has called you out and then he gifted you with certain gifts to use to benefit the believers in the body of Christ; to build up the church; to help the common good as 1 Corinthians 12:7 says. Your spiritual gift is for the common good. Again, your spiritual gift is not primarily for you. As a matter of fact, there is no real emphasis on it being for you at all. In every context, spiritual gifts are given for the good of those around you in your small group, in your local church family.

But now we come to what I call "The Unique Gifts that the Victor Distributes." He has made conquest, he has bought the victory, he wants to build his kingdom, and now in verse 11, Paul says there are some unique gifts God gives to the church and the unique gifts are gifted men. Now I don't mean gifted that they are naturally gifted, there is some sort of inherent superiority to them. No, not at all. It's just that he gives them gifts and calls them to offices within the church and therefore he has given them as a gift to the church. Your pastor, your staff, is a gift from God to you for your benefit and for your blessing. Now, once again, the emphatic phrase in verse 8 is that, "He gave." This is of his doing. He gave.

Now as he continues on in verse 11 and he talks about those he gave, first he lists two offices that I hold are no longer in effect in Christendom today. These are offices that were used in the founding of the church and primarily until the New Testament canon of Scripture was completed, and once God used these two offices, apostles and prophets, in the founding of the church age, when I say the founding of the church, I mean they were the human instrument that compiled and even put in writing the doctrine, the truth on which the church would be built. Jesus said to Peter, "Upon this rock I will build my church." He meant the rock of the truth that he was the Christ, the Son of the living God. The rock of that doctrine. So these early apostles and early prophets had that foundational ministry of establishing the great doctrines. Today we would look back and say the Bible doctrines that our faith is based upon. And then those offices passed away.

So let's talk about them just for a moment. First of all, he says in verse 11, "He gave some as apostles." The word "apostle" has the idea of "one sent on a mission." These were men commissioned directly by Christ, witnesses of his resurrection. They had special inspirations. We know so many of them wrote part of the New Testament, at least they were the human authors. They had supreme authority. They could walk into any church anywhere and just take over. They had authority we don't believe any man has today. There is no one that we would let come down from the Southern Baptist headquarters in Nashville, Tennessee and walk in here and say, "I'm in charge tonight." Well, an apostle could do that.

He was attested by signs and wonders and miracles. I do not hold that these signs, wonders and miraculous gifts are normative in the church today. I wouldn't be so dogmatic to say God never does something, but it's not the normal practice and expectation as it was when the church was being founded and when these men were establishing the doctrines on which the church was built. They had an unlimited commission to preach and found churches but they had a limited duration. I believe that once the church was founded and the New Testament was finished, the office of apostle passed off. I think it's something like delegates to a national convention: once it's over, the position ceases to be. And so that's how we generally in Baptist life, evangelicals in general, have viewed the office of apostle.

Now secondly, he said not only apostles but he said God gave some as prophets. Now, the idea of a prophet here is an interpreter or a forth-teller of the divine will of God. There is a sense in which they received authoritative revelation from God directly. So they proclaimed or taught under the immediate influences of the Spirit of God and what they had was direct from God, it was authoritative, it was a divine revelation. Now, sometimes they would expound out of revelation already given but they could receive direct revelation from God. But again, I do not hold that that's true today. I would never allow, our elders would never allow someone, man or woman, to stand up and say, "Pastor, you have studied all week but you sit down, I have a prophetic word for this church today." Now, if somebody claimed they had a word, we would pull them aside and say, "Tell us what you think the word is and we'll discern and pray and look at Scripture and see if that's something that ought to be shared with the church." As a matter of fact, there are some brethren who hold to something of people receiving a word of knowledge sometimes they will call it, or a prophetic word, and I think these are sound believers, at least those who are open to this, and they have told me that in their congregations when somebody says, "I think I have a word from God for the church," the elders will pull them aside and hear what they have to say, and they will discern whether or not it should be relayed to the church. That's just safety, is it not? I believe you really open yourself up to a lot of satanic even influences if you just open up the church to whoever feels they have a word from God, shout it out, while the rest of us will bow down and obey. No, we're not going to do that. And as I was talking to a brother in one of these churches one time, I said, "Well, that's interesting because at Grace Life Church, if somebody were to say that, we would just say that they were suggesting the Holy Spirit is leading them to share this and you elders decide if you really think it ought to be shared." But we wouldn't call it a word of knowledge necessarily. However, a prophet of this day was not like that. He had divine, direct, authoritative revelation and, once again, from time immemorial, even going back through the ages of Reformed theology, pastors have held that these offices ceased to function after the first century or so.

Here's a verse that I think sheds some light on that. Hebrews 2. It should be on your screen. Hebrews 2:3 and 4, "how will we escape if we neglect so great a salvation?" Notice, "After it was at the first spoken through the Lord, it was confirmed to us by those who heard, God also bearing witness with them," them, those earliest apostles and prophets, "both by signs and wonders and by various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit according to His own will." I believe that is a strong implication that there was a

season of time when these men in the office of apostle or prophet would be used of God to proclaim the truth, being attested to by signs, wonders and miracles.

Just quite honestly, after 37 years of ministry as I have observed and watched off and on different preachers who claimed that they were going to perform signs and wonders and miracles, I just haven't seen anything that looked anything like the kind of miracles we see in the New Testament. Nothing close. Who was it, Oral Roberts that built the big hospital out in Tulsa, Oklahoma, who believed that these things are still functioning today and he believed he had the gift of miracles and healings. And as I've heard many preachers say, "If I had what Oral Roberts claimed he had, then I wouldn't be building hospitals, I would be emptying hospitals." I mean, that's what we see in the New Testament. We see without reputation, clear, undeniable, radical, miraculous healings and miracles happening and I believe verses like Hebrews 2:3 and 4 seem to indicate those things were for a season of time and did not last further than that season.

Now we come to offices of ministry that we feel are operational today. The next was an evangelist, and quite honestly, I think just as the Apostle Paul was an evangelist, you could put the word "missionary" here, or "church planter" here. Some people have a calling on their life whereby they want to set aside their lives and they want the church elders and the churches to give them their blessing to go out into missionary work to preach the Gospel and establish local New Testament churches. The evangelist here mentioned is just the idea of one who proclaims the good news. Now, as far as I can tell and scholars back this up, there is only one person in the entire New Testament who is even called an evangelist and that was Phillips in Acts 21:8, so it's not a very common thing even in the New Testament.

Now the verb for proclaiming the good news is used, I'm sorry, the verb in the noun version of this evangelist are the good news or proclaiming the good news is used 135 times, so the Bible is full of the concept of spreading the good news, the New Testament is filled with evangelism but I believe a lot of what we call evangelists and a lot of what we call evangelism is really not close to the New Testament model or example. For example, John MacArthur said one time, "An evangelist is not a man with 10 suits and 10 sermons who runs a roadshow." And too often that's sort of what we run into and in my experience and growing in pastoral ministry through the years, a lot of the men that I have come to know in evangelism, some good solid men, by the way, praise God for those, but a lot of them were much much sharper on techniques and methods and to be quite honest, gimmicks, than they were rich and weighty in doctrine and in Bible truth, and that's a tragic thing.

So there are uniquely gifted men who feel that they should go out and preach the Gospel and win souls and see churches planted and, by the way, that is missions. That is missions. If you're not doing that, then you're not doing the core of missions work and that's why Anchored in Truth missions, that's what we do and that's all we do because that's all we can find in the New Testament. Preach the word, i.e. preach the Gospel and plant churches and help those churches grow and mature so they can help send out more preachers and plant more churches. But again, far too much in the last 100 years or so of

what we have called evangelist and evangelism seem to be those who are polished and skilled in methods and traditions, and sometimes unfortunately, even in manipulations, to get decisions rather than men who are thoroughly grounded in Bible doctrine who are out to make disciples.

Now we do have some great examples from church history. I wish all of you would read up, and you've got to be careful because the biographers sometimes put a slant on a man's life to fit their doctrine and theology, but a good Dallimore is a good writer on the life of George Whitefield, for example. It had a great impact on my life to read of the evangelistic ministry of George Whitefield. George Whitefield was a staunch Calvinist and possibly during the Great Awakening, more men were saved under his ministry than almost any other ministry that we've known since the time of Christ. I mean, two continents were shaken by Whitefield and other associates during the Great Awakening, and Whitefield himself cared deeply about doctrine and studied thoroughly the word of God and he measured success of his evangelism only by lasting fruit. In fact, Whitefield would not even call a person converted until he checked back six months later to see if they looked like a Christian. Now, I get pamphlets and fliers in the mail all the time from an evangelist and they constantly want to say, "So-and-so, I had a meeting at So-and-so church and 27 were saved." Whitefield would say, "How do you know? How do you know?" What you meant is 27 raised their hand or 27 checked a card or 27 walked to the front, but we don't know if they are genuinely converted. That's a miraculous event that changes a person's heart and life.

So it's interesting, early evangelists, even early Baptist evangelists would have thought the methods of the last 50 years that we have grown accustomed to are very off-track. Very off-track and that's really one of the things that saved my ministry is studying church history and thinking, "Now wait a minute. What these guys call..." As a matter of fact, I read Spurgeon's book on soul winning and I was frustrated the whole time I read it. I thought, "Where are the techniques? Where are the methods? Where is the one, two, three at the end to get them saved?" But Spurgeon didn't do any of it. In his whole book on soul winning, he's all about giving them the message of the truth and trusting God to bring them to repentance and faith, not helping them jump through a hoop or check off something at the end of the simplistic Gospel message.

So in today's evangelism, again, we have called anything and everything conversion. Well, they checked the card. Well, they raised their hand. Well, they walked down the aisle. Well, they prayed a prayer. I'm not saying any of that is absolutely evil but just don't call that conversion because you don't know. You just don't know. Evangelism today is so often stuck in this muddy abyss that to even discuss the need for careful, biblical, extended counseling of those who are coming for salvation is viewed with disdain or bewilderment. They would just criticize us and say, "How dare you say they are not saved!" Well, I'm not saying they're not saved, I just can't say they are saved until we investigate with the word of God and look for evidences of the true new birth. I'm telling you, my children and my grandchildren are too valuable to me and I think to the Lord to push them through some motion and some emotional three minute, five minute service at the end of a vacation Bible school. They are more important than that and

God's reputation is certainly more important than that. And I know you appreciate our changing through the years to never back off on evangelism. No, we are going to urge all men everywhere to repent and come to Christ but go slow on telling them, "Well, you're done."

Of course, the dominoes fall when you have this easy-believism that is sometimes called decisionism and evangelism is just who can get the people to make a decision. Friends, you can make a decision all day long and not be born again. Decisionism is not necessarily the new birth. Sometimes it's emotionalism. And as we have worked to change that through the years, I think you've grown to appreciate that we are taking the time, hours and sometimes many many hours. You know, there is one true friend that from the time you believe you're converted until the time you die, you are continually seeking the Lord about your salvation. I don't mean that you're tossing in bed and troubled every night and can't sleep, but there is a sense in which as the verse says, "Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord," it doesn't mean that's a one time hoop jump event, it means your heart has changed so now you are a caller on the Lord as your only hope of salvation. You call on him when you get up in the morning. You call on him when you walk along the way. You call on him at lunch. You just from your heart, you are constantly in this communion with God saying, "Christ, you are my only hope and you're my only Savior and if you don't keep me saved, I'm certainly sunk." You become one who calls on the Lord. It's a continual condition. As I told you, you don't just repent, you became a repentor. You don't just have faith, you became a faither.

I'll be honest, if you're a little bit talented, it's fairly easy to work out a system where you can get a lot of people to make decisions and call yourself successful, but it's hard, long and difficult work to labor with people to where they come to understand the Scriptures and they come to identify the work of the Spirit in their own heart and they come to say, "Pastor, or Brother Matt, or Brother Steve, or whoever, I know this has happened in my heart. I know Christ is my hope of salvation now. I know I'm ready for baptism." That may take months sometimes but a precious soul is worth it, amen?

We know the statistics are overwhelmingly clear, there's no debate, that the modern era of evangelism though some have been saved and thank God for it, however, the careless, reckless, quick fix, go through the motions, hoop jump nonsense we call evangelism has put millions of people on church rolls who do not know Christ. It's clear they don't know Christ. So we are a little bit over on what I was going to say about evangelists but I think primarily this refers to that person going into missions to preach the Gospel and found churches.

Now we get to apostles, prophets, evangelists and now pastor/teachers, and the phrase "pastors and teachers" there in verse 11 really, I think, it means one office. It means the pastor has the idea of a shepherd but a shepherd who shepherds by teaching. It's a shepherd whose primary job is teaching, or shepherds who shepherd by teaching, or a pastor whose job is teaching or a teaching shepherd. You can say it all those ways. You get the idea. And some verses on the pastor as a shepherd, 1 Peter 5:2, "shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily,

according to the will of God; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness." That's the idea of shepherding. Matthew 2:6, "And you, Bethlehem, land of Judah, are by no means least among the leaders of Judah; for out of you shall come forth a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel." That's a picture of Christ. He shepherds but he shepherds through his under shepherds who he has called to the office of pastor/teacher and they are a gift to the church.

Then the concept that a pastor's primary role is preaching and teaching is so abundantly clear in Scripture and I spend an enormous amount of energy dealing with churches and elder bodies and pastors trying to get them to this position. I believe – are you listening to your pastor this evening? I believe the greatest work of Satan possibly in the world today is to take good people who do not understand the primary task of the pastor is to preach the word of God and they dump everything in the world on his plate. He is taking care of the nursery. He is making sure the children's program is right. He's fixing the air conditioner. He is calling the guy about the plumbing that's not working. 1,001 ministries, things that are important, instead of setting him aside to use his energies in studying and preaching and teaching the word of God.

I've said this to you before but had you not changed a decade or two ago and released me to spend my primary energies in casting division and overseeing but primarily preparing to preach and preaching, I would not be in the ministry today. It's just too exhausting. There is a heart wrenching draining that comes with preaching that none of you, and I don't mean this demeaning, and I sure don't mean it exulting about me, but none of you can grasp. You will not get it unless you're called to preach and do it for 30 years. And that's why everything in the New Testament written about how to take care of the pastor was written by a pastor. The Apostle Paul wrote everything we know about how to take care of the pastor. Why? Because he understood it. And the dividend you receive is you want a man in your pulpit that is refreshed. You want a man in your pulpit that is energized. You want a man in your pulpit that has a passion for what he's doing because so many pastors by the time they are 35 or 40 at the most, they have quit preaching. Now, they're still going to the pulpit but as far as throwing their energies there, they are just going through the motions. If you changed today and you said, "All right, pastor, you've got to bing bing bing bing bing and you've also got to get ready to preach on Sunday," I can do that, I can grind that out but I'm going to tell you what: I will not be effective in preaching the word to the salvation of your soul, of your children's souls, and your grandchildren's souls like I need to be and what a detriment that is to you and your family and to God's church. So I thank you for having the heart to be biblical in this aspect.

Just real quickly, 2 Timothy 3:16, verses we've looked at before, he tells Timothy, Paul is training this young pastor, Timothy, and he says, "All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work. I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom." He says, "I'm summoning all these witnesses, Timothy, to make sure you do one primary central thing," verse 2, "preach the word; be ready in season and out of season," that means when it's easy and when it's hard,

"reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires, and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths. But you, be sober in all things, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry." So we see the centrality of preaching.

Let me just run real quickly through some other verses. 2 Timothy 2:15, Paul again instructing Timothy. What is he going to talk about? "Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed." What kind of work are you talking about, Paul? "Accurately handling the word of truth." Take the time to make sure you know what the Bible says so you can handle it accurately as you give it to your sheep, to your flock.

1 Timothy 4:13 through 15, again Paul instructing a young pastor, "Until I come, give attention to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation and teaching. Do not neglect the spiritual gift within you, which was bestowed on you through prophetic utterance with the laying on of hands by the presbytery." Then he says, "Take pains with these things; be absorbed in them, so that your progress will be evident to all." He says, "Timothy, I don't care what anybody in the church may brag on you about. They may brag on you about 101 different things but they'd better know that you are progressing in your grasp of doctrine and your preaching of the word of God." Did you hear me? That's what a pastor must be known for, has his grasp of the truth and his passion and conviction of preaching grown through the years? "Well, he's always there when I need him," and I believe that's one of the great snares of Satan right there. Somebody said if the pastor is always there when you need him, he's not worth much when you find him. You don't need me, you need the Christ I am commissioned to preach because he will always be there when I am dead and gone.

1 Timothy 6:2, again Paul writing to this young pastor he's training, "Those who have believers as their masters must not be disrespectful to them because they are brethren, but must serve them all the more, because those who partake of the benefit are believers and beloved." Now how are you going to lead in this thing? "Teach and preach these principles." Teach and preach. 1 Timothy 4:11, "Prescribe and teach these things." 1 Timothy 4:6, "In pointing out these things to the brethren, you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus, constantly nourished on the words of the faith and of the sound doctrine which you have been following." 1 Timothy 5:17, "The elders who rule well are to be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at," what? "Preaching and teaching."

So in summary, the Scriptures, that's the tool the pastor must use for teaching, reproof, for correction, for all training in righteousness. The Scriptures make the pastor adequate for every good work. He must be faithful to preach the Scriptures to the people in season and out of season. You know, all of these things through the years, it's become sad to watch when stay in a community almost four decades like I have and see church after

church after church after church keep reinventing themselves every 3 to 5 or 8 years. A new thing. We're going to do this new thing now.

You may remember this story and this family is a strong supporter and follower of our ministry today but there is a group up in Tennessee who were starting a new church and they came down here, this has been a couple of decades ago, and said, "We wanted to come and visit your church because we're starting a new church. We're starting a contemporary church." And I said, "Well, we're trying to build one that looks 2,000 years old because that's when this was written." These concepts, these precepts do not change and so I would really exhort young couples, please don't be pulled by all the new exciting twists and ideas and fads that come through church life. And by the way, many of those fads and gimmicks and new niches come dressed in Reformed clothing. They will hold to the doctrines of grace and you'll think this is wonderful and it's not wonderful because in reality they just put that façade of Reformed theology on it to make it look good when the core of it is actually just another fad, another trend, another gimmick.

So we must be faithful in season and out of season. No matter what the current trend is, we stay with what God called us to do and be as pastors. We must preach though many may turn away and our popularity may wane. We must be faithful in our preaching through many hardships. The pastor is to be constantly nourished on sound doctrine. He is to give attention and hold to the practice of exhortation and of teaching. He is to take pains in these things. Literally that phrase when Paul told Timothy, "take pains," it means to be up to your ears in this. Then he literally said to exhaust himself in it. So he is to take pains in it, be absorbed in it, even labor to the point of exhaustion. I often exhort elder bodies as they are talking about their preaching pastor and I'm trying to get them to release him to his main calling and quit getting all this other stuff off of him, I say, "How is he going to labor to the point of exhaustion and do anything else? If he is to labor in preaching and teaching and studying until he is exhausted, where is he going to have the energy for all these other things you're requiring him to do? The pastor is not your hired boy, he's God's gift to do God's work God's way in God's church." He is to be a diligent workman, always handling accurately the word of truth.

So these Scriptures make it unmistakably clear that the primary role and major interest of a pastor's time and energy must be studying and praying and preaching and teaching. That's why Paul says here as he says, "And now here are some unique gifts God has given the church, he gave us apostles for that and prophets for that foundational stage, now he has given us missionary evangelist church planters and local church pastors whose shepherding job is teaching." Of course, he will continue on here and we will see this next time we look at Ephesians, it might be a couple of three weeks, that we might have everybody being "equipped for the work of service for the building up of the body of Christ."

CPAs. 1. Realize the well-being of the world depends on the strength of the Christian pulpit. Literally the well-being of the world. "Pastor, you don't...?" I mean it exactly the way I'm saying it. The entire world depends on the well-being of the Christian pulpit. One Harvard history professor said there would never have been the discovery of

America without the preaching of evangelicals and Protestant ministers. The preaching of the word of God in ancient England led a people to long for a place where they could live out the faith being preached by those faithful expositors of the Reformation.

Everything depends on a strong Christian pulpit. God is the foundation of all things and all will fall if it's not founded on him, and the church holds to the truth that God brings men to God and he brings men to God through the agency of the preached Gospel. The church is the centerpiece of all that God is doing in the world. The Bible in 1 Timothy 3:15 says the church is "the pillar and support of the truth." We are the salt and the light of the culture and that depends and extends primarily from the pulpit. When I preach, I'm not just proclaiming what I feel and think, I'm proclaiming what we feel and think. If you have a weak pulpit, then you have weak men. And when you have weak men, you have weak homes and families. And when you have weak homes and families, you have a weak church. And when you have weak churches, you have a weak country and America has never been weaker. You can vote for who you want to and we certainly should do that as Christians, that's our civic responsibility, but we are not going to have this country back to anywhere where it needs to be until the pulpits get right in this country.

2. We must support evangelists, I would expand that and say missionaries and church planters, who are passionate about the Gospel and not so passionate about methods and schemes to get responses. I was in India a couple of decades ago and teaching in the seminary there in Madras, India, and they let us come in and train their professors and everybody there, and they had all of these church planters and these church planters would come in and give reports. It was astonishing the results. I mean, in a week's time some of these guys would report 20, 30 churches planted, but all they were doing was going into these communities and throwing out just a little tiny dose of Gospel and then asking these people to call on Jesus to be their Lord and Savior, and so all these people in all these polytheistic communities called on Jesus and added him to the other 12 gods they worshiped. It wasn't conversion but it looked good and the numbers were good. Maybe they were sincere. I don't know. I challenged them on some of those things.

That's not what we're looking for but we should really support missionaries, church planters, evangelists. I call that all one thing. We are passionate about the Gospel and these church planters we are supporting around the world are these kind of guys and they connected with us for this very reason: that they were in their own country seeing the schemes and the gimmicks and the easy-believism and the shallowness and the unconverted church members and they learned about our ministry and said, "Can we connect with y'all. That's what we want to do, the way you're preaching the Gospel and the way you're looking for true evidences of the new birth and true evangelism." So we need to continue in our Anchored in Truth missions to support these things.

And I just want to mention this, I may say it again, I may not ever say it again, but I have been, I had a person who met with me recently and said that they are setting up a very very great amount of money as a trust for Anchored in Truth missions. It seems legitimate and it seems solid. We'll see. I had a man show me his portfolio one time and said, "Pastor, when I die, I'm giving the ministry half a million dollars." I mean, he had

the money, and then some relatives got involved and we got \$25,000 when it was all said and done. So you just don't know what's going to happen but, you know, it just... Do you know and I mean decades, do you know for decades almost nobody supported Anchored in Truth but Pam Noblit and me? We were the donors to Anchored in Truth missions. I mean for decades, and so I'm very blessed and encouraged that God is beginning to raise up people who are saying, "We want to stand with you." And we need to always stand with these guys who are about true evangelistic and missionary work. Oh, goodness, so much to say but I'll skip it.

3. I said enough about this but I'll just mention it: churches must strive to free the pastor/teacher to study, pray, preach the word of God. Pray for me. It's what I do most of my time in Anchored in Truth is try to help churches free the preaching of the word up. What do we see in Acts 6? In Acts 6 the precious widows in the church were being neglected in the daily distribution of food and so the preaching pastors called the church together and said, "This is a very serious need but we can't do it so find some Spirit-filled men and appoint those men to oversee the distribution of food so these ladies aren't neglected because we must spend our time studying and preaching." That's a foundational principle for the church for all ages right there. Not that other things aren't important, but they do not rise to the importance of the preaching of the word of God faithfully.

4. Expect Satan to do everything he can to thwart the preaching of the word of God. It was quite a difficult journey to get Grace Life Church to where you overwhelmingly support and stand on the preaching of the word as the primary ministry of the church. It hadn't always. If you have joined in the last decade or so, trust me, there have been some tough battles fought before you got here and I'm convinced some of them took a decade off my life. I'm not so sure but I'm thankful God led us get here and are you listening to me? I know why God got us here, so we can help others. He got us here so we could prove you can get through it and a church will support a biblical ministry.

Again, it's just unbelievable how good men have a shallow unbiblical concept of the pastor's role and duties. Amos 5:10 says, "They hate him who reproves in the gate." So there is always going to be opposition to a strong preaching ministry. That's why you need to do everything you can to make sure you understand Satan is going to try to thwart it and attack it.

And then real quickly, how we can work to protect the preaching of the word. That's the fifth thing. Prayer. The Apostle Paul in Ephesians 6:19 said, "Pray that we will have boldness in our preaching and we will have utterance in our preaching." Support, 1 Timothy 5:17, "The elders who rule well are to be considered worthy of double honor." Every scholar and commentary writer I know of says that includes material support and I think the reason for that is that if your pastor is going to be effective, he can't be worrying about paying the bills all the time. You ought to err on the side of joyous and generous support so that he is freed up from concerns to faithfully preach the word of God and our elders have been faithful there and I thank God for that.

And by the way, many of you have sent me cards and little gifts and gestures. I always am surprised in October when I get these nice cards and letters and I think, "What's this all about?" Then I find out it's Pastor Appreciation Month. Who comes up with this stuff? You know, everybody gets an appreciation month or a day or something, but I am grateful. I'm very grateful for your thoughtfulness this month and I go down the road and I see these signs and I'm glad you don't put a sign up there that says, "We love Brother Jeff and his Pam." If you love Brother Jeff and his Pam, take care of us. And you do that, by the way, amen? I can guarantee you, half of, no, 70% of these churches that put those silly signs up are treating their pastors like a hired servant, not as a man called to preach. Take the sign down and take care of the man of God! Did I make that clear enough? You know, a lot of preachers and elders listen to these sermons online so I want to make sure I'm clear.

So pray for him, support him, and then encourage him through your obedience. Paul wrote to the Corinthians and the Philippians about how deeply he was encouraged to hear that when he preached the word to them, they were growing in obedience. And I can tell you, that's my greatest joy is to see Grace Life Church growing in loving and treasuring Christ and walking in sound doctrine. It's such an encouragement.

Be a deflector of distractors. Be a deflector of distractors. In 2 Timothy 2:23, Paul again is instructing Timothy and he says, "refuse foolish and ignorant speculations, knowing that they produce quarrels." Ignorant speculations there is really undisciplined minds. He's saying, "You're going to have some people in your churches and they have undisciplined minds, Timothy." In other words, they haven't disciplined their minds to let stuff that don't matter go out of their minds. Have you disciplined your mind that when you have something of concern, a worry, something you think is a big deal but it's really not a big deal and you just think it's a big deal but you are disciplined and mature enough to grab that and get it out of the way? "Get out of my mind!" And throw it out. That's what this means. He said, "Timothy, watch out. You'll spend all your time dealing with extra biblical, personal preference nonsense that just don't matter and it will drain your energy and affect your preaching." That's what he was saying. So you need to learn to deflect that stuff out of your own brain and out of other people's brains if it pops out of their brain and comes into your brain. It's distracting stuff that just doesn't matter. We are to reject that which is evil and hold to that which is good.

And I'll end with this verse, 1 Timothy 5:19 to 20. I'm not sure, did we get that one up, guys? 1 Timothy 5:19 and 20, "Do not receive an accusation against an elder except on the basis of two or three witnesses. Those who continue in sin, rebuke in the presence of all, so that the rest also will be fearful of sinning." Now one of the reasons again Paul writes to this young preacher, Timothy, and says, "In the process of setting up the churches and having pastors in the churches, you're not even to listen to an accusation a pastor has done wrong unless there are two or three people that can confirm that it's serious and it really happened," because Satan is going to always, Satan will always have people trying to undermine the credibility of a faithful preacher. So he said, "There's got to be a high standard before you even listen to something as an accusation against one of God's elders."

Well, as Paul is writing to the church he's saying, "Christ Jesus is the Victor. He has reclaimed his own and he has distributed gifts so that his church could be built up, and in the midst of distributing gifts, one of his gifts is giving to the church gifted men to function in the role of, among other things, pastor/teacher." I believe it's true and I'm not just saying this, I believe it's true, one thing I know is churches. I know churches. I know church life. I get it and know how it works and I have been an ardent student of church history and where we have come as the professing churches of God through the generations: I don't think there is a church anywhere who gets it better than you get it but that means we have a lot of responsibility to maintain it and help others to get it so God can be glorified in his church.