

For the Cause of Truth

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Bible Verse: Nehemiah 2:17-20
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Well, this morning we're going to open up a long series of messages that will be connected together like links of sausage that will give us the source of Christian clarity, Christian courage, Christian compassion, Christian consolation. All of those things are grounded in the reality of Christian biblical truth, and it is essential for us to lay a strong, broad, deep foundation to establish those things in your hearts.

Some of you may have heard, may remember the message that I gave at the Truth Matters Conference back in May. I was assigned at that point the broad topic of sexuality and gender to speak on. I did not take that occasion to detail LGBTQ issues. I approached it in a different way that is pertinent for everything that I want to do in these next few months here at Truth Community Church. It was interesting as I preached that night, there was a pastor in the room and he was deeply affected by what I had to say that evening. The message crystallized in his mind, he would tell you, the challenge of this age to him, the age in which we live, and every day since then he's thought about that message. It burdened his desires for his flock as he went back to ministry with them, gave him a perspective on the totality of what ministry should be like in a broader way, I guess he would say, and it committed him to an irreversible, irrevocable direction in his pulpit, his ministry and whatever else the Lord would give to him. This will sound strange to you but that pastor was me. That pastor was me and the Lord did a work in my heart even as I was preaching that message and I said a few things that were not part of my prepared remarks that have just so gripped my heart that I must act upon them. I don't know if that message meant diddly squat to anyone else in the room, but I have to respond to it and by God's grace I will.

I think that this will have long term implications for Truth Community Church and so for two weeks today and next week, I plan to explain and expound on what I said that night back in May. To set the context, what I would like to do this morning is to read a brief passage from the Old Testament book of Nehemiah, and if you would turn in your Bibles to Nehemiah, it's just before the book of Job, before the Psalms, if that helps you find it. In Nehemiah 2:17 we read this, this is Nehemiah speaking and he said,

17 Then I said to them, "You see the trouble we are in, how Jerusalem lies in ruins with its gates burned. Come, let us build the wall of Jerusalem, that we may no longer suffer derision." 18 And I told them of the hand of

my God that had been upon me for good, and also of the words that the king had spoken to me. And they said, "Let us rise up and build." So they strengthened their hands for the good work. 19 But when Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite servant and Geshem the Arab heard of it, they jeered at us and despised us and said, "What is this thing that you are doing? Are you rebelling against the king?" 20 Then I replied to them, "The God of heaven will make us prosper, and we his servants will arise and build, but you have no portion or right or claim in Jerusalem."

Only the briefest word of context for that text that I just read. In 586 BC, the Babylonians destroyed the city of Jerusalem. Scripture tells us that it was a judgment of God upon his rebellious people. He was disciplining them. The Babylonians took the Jews out into exile as judgment from God. They were taken from the land that flows with milk and honey and taken to a place where the language and the home was not theirs to teach them that they were not to follow idols, that they were not to rebel against God. He utterly thoroughly humbled them as a result of their many centuries of sin against him and abandoning the word of God. When Nehemiah writes now, over 100 years have passed. The Persians have conquered the Babylonians and a new king is in place, and Nehemiah was influential with that Persian king, and yet his heart was burdened over the state of his homeland, of the city of the King, Mount Zion, the city of God. And so the king gave him opportunity to speak. Nehemiah explained his concern and God working through that Persian king gave Nehemiah permission to leave his civic responsibilities and to go home, as it were, and to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem, to begin to restart the work of God in that chosen place and to reestablish the boundaries of God and to reestablish a sense of his glory and of his purpose being worked out among men. It was a massive task. The city had been thoroughly destroyed. The walls around the city and that's how cities worked that day, they had walls built around the city for military protection and established boundaries and all of that, and the walls were utterly broken down. This place was desolate and in need of massive massive attention. The project seemed unbearably great, but Nehemiah trusted the Lord. He called the people to work, and in time the walls of Jerusalem were rebuilt, the people were back into their city ready to serve the Lord with a freshness of purpose. What God had done, you could say, as God had turned their weakness into a display of his strength, this is what God does amongst his people, he perfects his strength in our weakness.

Now keep that in mind as we turn to the challenge of our age, the challenge not to a physical location but to the spiritual principle and the existence of truth itself. We face – this is an oversimplification, of course, but we face a threefold challenge as we seek to uphold the truth of God in this wicked age in which we live, and in turn I want to go through them one by one: the challenge in culture, the challenge in the church, and our challenge with cosmic forces.

What I said on that fateful night in May as we spoke about the issues surrounding the sexual chaos in our culture today, we start with this first principle: the challenge in our culture. You know, and I'm using the walls of Jerusalem as a metaphor for what we're facing today, beloved, the spiritual walls of the church are utterly broken down, as you

will see and you will be convinced of by the time we are done today, the Spirit of God helping me. The walls are broken down and the question is what are we going to do about it, and what we, as we think about the sexual dysfunction in our world today and the rise of and acceptance of homosexuality and homosexual so-called marriage even within the past 10 years, 7-8 years since the regrettable Supreme Court decision in 2015, and then immediately following that, the explosion of the agenda of transgenderism being pushed upon us, here's what you need to see and must understand about that, beloved. You must realize that the general acceptance, the approval that is given to these anti-biblical ways of life, the acceptance of that sexual chaos in our culture is the fruit of an entire way of thinking. The issues, the public issues to which I have alluded just now, are really not the issue at hand. It's not the issue at stake. And for the church, for Christians, if we think only about these matters in terms of the behavior and the outward manifestation of these things, if we are only consumed with how it makes us feel uncomfortable or perhaps threatens our integrity in a workplace as, you know, as the diversity people impose their agenda upon the workplace, if we only address it from that perspective we have utterly missed the point of what's actually at stake, and we as a church, as the people of God, if that's all that we think about, we have lost the argument before it even begins. If a little closer to home, if we think that this is simply a matter of evangelism and we need to have targeted ministries for the LGBTQ communities, if we think that that's the response that needs to be made, we have missed the point completely. We have lost the argument before it even begins because we're not dealing with the root, what the cause of all of this chaos in our society is. Beloved, what you and I have to do, what the church of Jesus Christ has to do, what the challenge of the age not just for me, not just for Truth Community Church, but for the entire segment of the like-minded body of Christ is a great challenge because we need to think and we need to teach in categories that many of us are not used to engaging.

I say this sympathetically, I say this as a man of like common flesh. I say this as a man prone to easy distraction from the things at hand, but we are so much creatures of flesh, so much driven by what we see and by daily responsibilities and daily life, that we neglect the underlying matters of truth and knowledge at a profound level. You see, the sexual chaos that we see today is a sign of postmodern thinking. Postmodern thinking and if that term is fuzzy or unfamiliar to you, don't worry, we'll address it forthwith here. I've got to repeat this because this is pivotally important. The sexual chaos is a symptom of the greater disease. If you could make the sexual chaos go away with a snap of the fingers, the problem would still remain. It would be like taking scissors and snipping off a noxious weed in your garden but leaving the root unaddressed, it's just going to come back in another form. We have to get to the bottom of this postmodern madness.

What is postmodernism? John MacArthur defines it this way in his little book titled "Why One Way," that book is far more important than its size would suggest or even the familiarity that the church may have with it. John MacArthur says this, now listen carefully, "To the postmodernist, reality is whatever the individual imagines it to be. That means that what is true is determined subjectively by each person. There is no such thing as objective, authoritative truth that governs or applies to all humanity universally." And do you know what? I think that's so important, I'm going to say it again because I want

you to get this. This is the crux of the matter. This is the issue of our age. "To the postmodernist, reality is whatever the individual imagines it to be. That means what is true is determined subjectively by each person. There is no such thing as objective, authoritative truth that governs or applies to all humanity universally."

Beloved, that's the mindset of the age in which we live. "You have your truth, I have mine. I define truth for myself, you can define it for yourself and we shouldn't challenge each other on these things." Now when you think through these matters, you'll soon enough come to recognize, even if it's not immediately apparent to you right now, the sexual chaos of our day is based on a presupposition. It's based on an assumption in the way people think that drives everything else. You could put it this way: a presupposition is something that men take for granted in the way that they think. We all have presuppositions. Most of us have not taken the time to examine them and to understand what it is, but there is built into our mind's assumption about the nature of reality that governs everything else, and what is the dominant presupposition in our world today? I say this without fear of contradiction: reality is determined by what someone feels on the inside. That's what's real according to the mind of the world in which we live. And again, the sexual chaos just serves as a convenient illustration of the greater point. Don't miss this. This is not a message about homosexuality or transgenderism. These are simply illustrations of the greater point.

So think with me here. The confirmed committed homosexual bases his identity and projects his identity to the world based on his sexual attraction and his sexual behavior, but it's driven by the things that he feels or she feels inside. And so people talk about their, you know, their desires and all of that, and there's more that could be said about that. Even more clearly, even more clearly, the transgender person bases his or her identity – stay with me – on inward self-perception. If I feel like I'm a girl in a boy's body, then I am a girl. The way I feel determines what is real so much so that physical anatomy is irrelevant to the consideration. It's not that the mind and the thinking needs to change, it's that the body needs to be changed, that the outward projection of my identity changes to conform with what I feel inside. And beloved, what all that is telling us is that desires and feelings have become the basis for truth, so much so that it's not just the way that as a transgender person I feel about it, you must accept my self-perception. You must call me a girl. You must call me she. You must call me Miss, Mrs. or Ms, even if I have the body of a boy. You must disregard everything else and address me by what I command. I have defined reality and your perception and definition of reality must conform to mine, and on top of that understand that this is driven by what I feel inside so that as it plays out in the realm of athletics, a man can compete in swimming events all of his life, change his mind, become a girl and suddenly be competing in female athletics a short time later simply based on his change in perception or his outward acknowledgment of what he's always felt inside, and the NCAA and all of his competition and everybody else has to bow down to that self-identity change. It's madness. But understand, beloved, that when we say that reality is determined by what I feel inside, that is a philosophical matter of profound consequence. It is a philosophical matter of profound consequence. Now don't let the long word "philosophical" intimidate you away from what we're saying here today. I'm just using the term "philosophical" to mean that it relates to matters of

knowledge and reality. How do we know what is true? What is real? How do we know what is true about identity and purpose in the universe and in my own life? The spirit of our age responds to that question and says it's based on what's inside you. It's based on what you feel. Colloquially, "You be you, that's what's real. You decide it for yourself."

Now look, what the church has to do, what the church of Jesus Christ has to do, I'm using "church" in an expansive way beyond Truth Community Church here this morning, what Christians, what Christian leaders, what Christian pastors have to recognize about all of this is that the challenge of our age is a battle over truth itself, over the nature of what is true and how we even know what is true or not. This is not a battle over sexuality, this is a battle over truth. Now please stay with me and I can make this, illustrate this and I think make it plain in your minds. We gather together as Bible-believing Christians in our little subculture of the world, and rightly so, we appeal to Scripture as we speak about what is true. This is what, for most of us, we inherited from our families or from our prior teachers and it is right that we do. We appeal to Scripture and say, "This is true. This is the word of God. This is truth." They, the spirit of the age, the spirit of our world, they deny that truth even exists. They deny the principle of truth. They deny the principle of transcendent reality that applies to all people at all time, and that is a necessary consequence of what their judgment of what truth is. If truth is based on what is inside of a person, then there are 7 billion different potential sources for what is true whereas according to Scripture there is one, that truth does exist, that there is transcendent truth that applies to all men at all times. We appeal to Scripture. They deny that truth even exists. We preach biblical ethics and say, "This is what God would have men to do." The spirit of our age rejects the very concept of external authority. "There is no authority but me and what I feel." They reject that very idea.

Now listen, beloved, I think that's as technical as I'm going to get here in the message today, but you must understand this, you know, as we speak in our realm and in our world and all of that, we speak from certain presuppositions that truth exists, that God exists, that truth is found in Scripture, that Jesus is Lord. That's part of a Christian mindset and what you and I have to recognize if we are going to live in this age and if we are going to do anything to preserve truth for the next generation and generations yet to be born, if we're going to do something to keep the light shining in the midst of the darkness, you and I have to understand that the culture around us does not even recognize our presuppositions. It's utterly foreign to them. We speak past each other on these matters for reasons that many don't even examine.

That alone presents a great great challenge to the church of Jesus Christ. That's the challenge from our culture, and I'll have more to say about this in the months to come, trust me. I would say that there's an even greater problem much closer to home. The culture would be bad enough but, in one sense, we could live with that, we could respond to that as the people of God from a position of strength except for the challenge that we face in the church of Jesus Christ, second point. We saw the challenge in the culture. Secondly, the challenge in the church. This is painful. This is uncomfortable to be confronted with but it must be done. The things which I'm about to say make enemies of people who thought they were our friends. The church itself, beloved, has undercut

biblical truth, biblical authority, and biblical morality. The church itself, the professing church of Christ, so-called evangelicals are at the heart of the problem. And let me illustrate with a sevenfold demonstration of the truth of what I just said to you, seven in the Bible is the number of completeness. Let me just go through these one by one. Remember, this is the challenge in the church that we have. This is the challenge facing those that would uphold the truth of God as the purpose of their existence.

What are those challenges within the church? Well, we cover several decades in couple of minutes here. First of all, the Willow Creek, Rick Warren, Crossroads, Seeker Sensitive model of ministry has conditioned men to expect the church to provide for them a soothing place of inspirational messages with many age-specific programs and a healthy dose of light-hearted laughter and contemporary music when we gather together. For decades, going back to Bill Hybels at Willow Creek in the suburbs of Chicago, this has taken root and spread its pernicious influence over the thinking and the expectations for subsequent generations. That's a challenge. That's a challenge and let me just say here, beloved, if you do any reading of church history at all, you go back and read what Christians were doing in the first three centuries after the time of Christ, you go to the Reformation and those who were the spiritual children of the Reformation, and you think of men like John Knox, some of these names may not be familiar to you, in time they will be, I hope. You look at names like John Knox and Martin Luther and John Calvin, William Perkins, the French Huguenots, Wycliffe, you go on and you look at Charles Spurgeon and Martyn Lloyd-Jones and other men of great transcendent character, you read anything of their writings, you read anything about their lives and see the courage, the conviction, the way they suffered, you look at their teaching. Beloved, I guarantee you that you cannot find anything resembling this superficial approach to ministry that we have been conditioned to accept as normal as the pattern for the church. This is not what Christ shed his blood for. This is not what thousands of French Huguenots shed their blood for at the Saint Bartholomew Massacre in 1572. They didn't die for a Seeker Sensitive model of ministry. They died for the truth at the hands of Roman Catholic butchers. I'm not alone in this. There are other like-minded men who share my sense of conviction about this but, beloved, I can't look at the blood of Christ flowing down metaphorically through the ages, I can't look at the lives of these eminent saints and teachers and pastors and be silent in my age when so many things have risen up against the truth that they lived, breathed, and died for.

The Willow Creek model. Secondly, the prosperity gospel has conditioned people to be selfish and to consider what is in the gospel for themselves in an earthly material sense. "How can I become rich like Abraham? How can I have God solve my problems?" And these charlatans tell them that, "For a donation to my ministry, God will return his blessing to you." Oh, there's prosperity in that gospel alright but it's not for the people that are being abused by it.

Thirdly, we taught on this in the past, you can look for these sermons online, in a phrase that will not be familiar to some of you, and that's okay, but the spirit of moralistic therapeutic deism has conditioned men and women to think like this, that God simply wants to help them in their problems and for people to be nice to each other, and that is

the God that is proclaimed to them. There is nothing in that about dying to self, taking up your cross and following Christ. God exists to help you, something like a AAA wrecker driver who just comes alongside when you're broken down, picks you up, gets you going again, and then goes and leaves and there's no accountability, there's no authority, there's nothing, there's no relationship or submission there. God's just there to help you through the rough spots, and you can keep going and get on with your life.

Fourthly, the charismatic movement has deluded millions and told them to look inside for new revelation from God. Pastors routinely cite their own visions, the word that God gave to them as authority, and they appeal to that which cannot be independently verified or falsified. And what a tragedy, what a sorrowful thing it is to see people following after false teachers like that. Beloved, these are the souls of men. These are eternal souls. Everything that we're talking about here has profound eternal consequences. This isn't just a matter of differences of opinion on religious matters, "It really don't matter and can we just hurry up and get to the Bengals game?" This is about truth itself.

More recently, some of you may know about the disastrous, and I love the providence of the fact that I'm saying this on this particular day on January 15th, more recently, in 2018 the Gospel Coalition put on the disastrous MLK 50 Conference supposedly in honor of the memory of Martin Luther King, and in the process they blew open the door to race baiting, and the social justice gospel in the church. In 2021, the Southern Baptist Convention elected a sermon plagiarist as its president, and then their entire leadership circle circled the wagons when criticism was raised against that and many called for his resignation. The Southern Baptist Convention rallied around a man who had been deceptive from his pulpit preaching the sermons of another man as though they were his own, and not nary a seminary president in that whole denomination stood out and called for his resignation.

Then perhaps closer to home for those that are like-minded with us, then we have our own stream, steady stream of men who disqualify themselves from ministry on the sake of their own sexual misconduct. Beloved, let me ask you a question in light of all of these things. Come back to the sexual chaos of our age, homosexuality and transgenderism, and you look at that. Now the church wants to say that truth matters on matters of sexuality. That's a joke. That's a travesty. Why do we, and I speak collectively, why do we as a church insist on the truth now when it is obvious, it is obvious as you look at the scene broadly, it is obvious that truth does not matter in these ministries when things that cause us discomfort are not pressed upon us? What's the change? Why does truth matter now if it hasn't mattered in the past 50 years?

But understand something else, beloved, understand that individual Christians are also part of the problem. Individual Christians, people like you and me are part of the problem here. It shows in different ways and at an individual level as opposed to an institutional level, it shows in the way that they talk about their daily life and their daily decisions. You've all heard someone say this, the things that I'm about to describe. I say it gently. Many of you have said these things yourself. What am I thinking about? What am I alluding to at this point in the message? "You know, the Lord spoke to me. The Lord

spoke to me about this. I heard God's voice." Or sounding a little more spiritual, maybe, "You know, I know what I'm about to do is God's will because I have peace about it." And let's not leave out a small church pastor's favorite, "After much prayer, I've decided to leave the church." In every instance, beloved, in every single instance of those and a thousand others like them, in every instance, feelings supposedly place what the person has said or decided beyond any challenge or any accountability. "I'm telling you that God spoke to me. I'm telling you that I've prayed about it and I have peace about it and therefore there is an infallibility attached to what I'm saying," they won't say it like this, but the whole spirit of what they're saying is that, "I am my own authority and you must accept it based on my self-testimony without regard to any counsel, reproof or accountability."

Beloved, here's what you need to see. Here's what you need to see. When Christians think that way, when Christians talk that way, when Christians live that way, live by their subjective impressions as being the revelation of God for their lives, the will of God for their lives, this is what you must understand is that they are operating by the power of the same presupposition as the transgender man or woman. "Truth is determined by what I feel inside and you must bow to what I say. You must accept it on my self-testimony." The Christian church that is like that is headed itself to a full acceptance of transgender ideology because the fundamental presupposition is identical. This person tells me he's a girl because of how he feels inside and I see that and I see that in the media or talk to people that I know and I get this thrown at me, and you do too, and then I turn around in ministry and I have people telling me that, "Based on what I feel, this is what the right thing is." It's the exact same principle. It's the exact same governing presupposition, and it isn't changed by whether it's supporting transgenderism or unfaithfulness in the church. It's the exact same principle, beloved.

If you can think about that and digest that and meditate on that and come to see why that is true, you've come a long way toward being a part of the revival of biblical thinking in the church today. Yes, beloved, yes, homosexuality and transgenderism violate biblical truth. Yes, these are things that are sins against God. But that's not our point for this morning. I believe out in the lobby as you leave, my series of messages on those topics are available in the CD form. You can find them online. It's readily available. We haven't hidden in a corner as we've taught those things. But beloved, just going back I want to set up what I'm about to say here, in light of Willow Creek and the prosperity gospel and moralistic therapeutic deism, in light of the charismatic movement, in light of the MLK. 50 Conference, in light of the Southern Baptist Convention, in light of the deplorable way that evangelical pastors routinely disqualify themselves from ministry, in light of all of that I ask you this question, I ask it rhetorically: how can the church confront society, how can the church help a confused society if the church itself is not clear on the very seat of authority that is needed to assess truth claims? The church is part of the problem. The church is part of the problem.

In a different context, Martyn Lloyd-Jones said this, he said, "I argue that in many ways it is the departure of the church from preaching that is responsible in a large measure for the state of modern society. The church has been preaching morality without godliness and it

simply does not work, and the result is that the church, having abandoned her real task, has left humanity more or less to its own devices." When the church abandons the truth, when the church abandons the centrality of the pulpit whether it's for entertainment or biblical counseling, or you choose whatever you want it to be, when the church abandons the pulpit, it leaves a vacuum of truth that other philosophies are going to rush in and to fill. That was the doctor's point, and the consequence on humanity is disastrous. It's sorrowful. Another author said this, he said, "To be blunt, the church has become a laughingstock with no moral authority to stand before the world and confront sin, declare Christ's Lordship, and speak with any credibility about sin, righteousness, or judgment."

Beloved, for you and me, this is a most serious matter that we cannot neglect, that we cannot avoid, that we cannot retreat into our own little circle and wait to die or for the coming of Christ. Listen, in 1 Peter 4:17 it says this, it says, "For it is time for judgment to begin with the household of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God?" You see, my friends, the evangelical church, to the extent that it even stands with us on these issues, the evangelical church should not and cannot congratulate itself on its sexual ethics today. The sad truth is that the collective failure, the collective failures of the church are so broad and so deeply ingrained that there is absolutely no human solution for it. This challenge, this problem of our age is beyond the solution that any one man, any one pastor, any one book, any one conference, any one, church can begin to address. That's especially true when we remember our final point for today, our third and final point as we're just kind of laying out the challenge to the church today. We saw the challenge in culture, the challenge in the church, thirdly, what I just said over these past 40 minutes or however long it's been, I have no idea, what I've just said by itself would be enough to help us recognize our utter helplessness to be able to address it. How do you change the way a culture thinks? How do you address systemic issues throughout the body of Christ as an individual Christian or as an individual pastor? It is impossible humanly speaking to do anything about it, and then you come to the third and final point and you realize we haven't even gotten to the worst of it, that which is most difficult, that which is most arrayed against us, and that is, thirdly, the challenge of cosmic forces. Of cosmic forces.

Scripture teaches us to discern things with a spiritual eye. In our day and age and in the evangelical church, the whole realm of the Satanic and the demonic is ignored as an inconvenient embarrassment in the enlightened age in which we live, but beloved, not for you and me. We cannot go there. We cannot allow ourselves to deny significant aspects of biblical revelation and significant aspects about the world as it exists, we can't do that and be faithful to Scripture and to be faithful to the Lord Jesus Christ who who loved us and gave himself up for us. We have to get our truth from Scripture, and when we do that, what do we see? What do we find? We find that the church of Jesus Christ has an archenemy; in the language of revelation, he is the ancient serpent who is called the devil and Satan. Beloved, when we think about the challenge in our culture, the denial of truth and the fruit from which grows from that, when we consider the challenge from our culture which we talked about in our first point, you and I need to remember this, we need to remember what Scripture says about the supernatural unseen reality of the entire situation. Scripture says the God of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers to

keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ who is the image of God, 2 Corinthians 4:4. Scripture says that the men of this world are following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience, Ephesians 2:2. Scripture says that unsaved men are captured by the devil to do his will, 1 Timothy 2:26. Scripture says that the whole world lies in the power of the evil one, 1 John 5:19.

Beloved, it's breathtaking, it's sobering is what I mean by that, to start to connect what we see in culture with what Scripture says about the forces at work in the world. The challenge of our culture is a visible effect of the invisible force of Satan himself. Satan intends to exclude God, rob him of his glory and to destroy men. It's what he's been doing since the garden of Eden when he misled our first parents. They disobeyed God and the fall ensued. This is what happens. There is a satanic element to this. Our philosophical environment around us in our culture, that philosophical environment is the merchant of death from Satan himself. No one can find truth in Christ, no one can find salvation from sin, no one can even think rightly, you can't even think rightly in this philosophical environment. People can't even process and interpret the gospel properly, Scripture says, because their minds have been blinded by the devil. Now look, either we believe Scripture and accept that as true or we're so proud and embarrassed to talk in those kinds of terms that we neglect it and deny Scripture in the process. There is a satanic overriding demonic dimension to what we're dealing with and by definition it is supernatural, by definition we are mere natural men without the power to resist, overcome and defeat it.

Non-Christians, individually, if you're not a Christian, what I'm about to say is true of you personally and in our decadent culture it's true on a broader level. Non-Christians are slaves to a power greater than themselves. Jesus said everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin. He looked at his age in the first century and he said, "You are of your father, the devil. He was a liar, a murderer from the beginning," John 8:44.

Beloved, any full, proper, right assessment of the spirit of our age has to start right there. We are in the middle of a supernatural battle that is beyond our power to address. We cannot, we must not ignore the influence of Satan or his schemes as we consider these things. The Apostle Paul said in 2 Corinthians 2 we are not ignorant of his designs. The biblical thinker, the Biblical Christian has to contemplate this, see it from Scripture and let that drive the way he views the world around him.

Now beloved, it's not just the influence of Satan and culture. Satan is active in the realm of the professing church of Christ as well. What did the Apostle Paul say in Ephesians 6? He said, "We do not wrestle against flesh and blood," he says this as he writes to the church, the church which was chosen before the foundation of the world in Christ, to that body of people, that body of believers, he says, "We, we do not wrestle against flesh and blood." In other words, it's more than what we see and observe with our physical senses. "We do not wrestle against flesh and blood but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places," Ephesians 6:12. The Apostle Peter said, "Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion seeking someone to devour."

Beloved, do we believe Scripture or not? I mean, I'm asking a simple question. I'm asking a simple question: do we affirm that this book is God inspired truth that reveals the reality of existence or not? If we do, then we need to take seriously the warnings and the description about the spiritual demonic realm that is arrayed against us. Satan is audacious. He is shameless. He is infinitely wicked. He is supernaturally powerful, not omnipotent, but supernaturally powerful. And as you read Scripture, you see his influence affecting and undermining the church. In the gospels, you see him tempting Christ in Matthew 4, our Lord alone being the one who successfully resisted him at all points. It was a lie of Satan to Ananias and Sapphira that brought judgment into the early church in Acts 5. Peter said, "Why have you listened to the lie of Satan and lied against the Holy Spirit?" When you read the book of Revelation 2 and 3, you'll see Christ speaking to seven different churches of the first century day, and in those chapters you will find Christ explicitly identifying the opposition and influence and effects of the devil's work in the churches of Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, and Philadelphia.

Beloved, what we need to understand and take seriously is that false teachers are not merely mistaken and have a difference of opinion about things with us, as if it's just kind of an in-house intramural debate that really doesn't matter. False teachers are mouthpieces for the enemy of our souls. False doctrine is not an innocent matter. It is deadly poison. False teachers are servants of Satan that are leading men to hell and it's not easy to identify them, it's not easy to recognize them. Our vulnerability to deception in this realm has no measure. Paul said in 2 Corinthians 11, he said even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light so it is no surprise if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness.

There are two ways to verify the truth of the satanic realm in the church. One is to see Scripture and to take it seriously, and secondly, is to see the effects all around us. You can see, begin to see why Scripture commands us to be discerning, to know the word of God, to be like the Bereans in Acts 17, to examine the Scriptures to see whether what you're being told is true or not. But beloved, here we are on the brink of a new year. Here we are God having placed us in an environment like this and what do we see? We face philosophical challenges from the culture. We face the challenges of false teachers and false movements within the professing church of Jesus Christ. And we face the supernatural challenge of Satan and demons. Only a fool, only a fool would try to project an air of confidence and ability in light of those things, and here's what we need to see and this kind of brings us full circle back to Truth Community Church and what lies ahead for us in ministry together, this is what you need to really grasp with. I'll say it again, one message does not solve this problem. What I've preached today doesn't dent what we're facing. You and I have to understand that we have been on this postmodern trajectory for decades and decades and it's going to take, absent a revival from the Holy Spirit, it is going to take decades and decades to undo it, to address it, to do something to correct it.

You see, beloved, speaking of the people of God, generally speaking, our walls of Jerusalem are broken down. They are consumed by fire and we must rebuild them. It is a

long task with satanic opposition. What could possibly give us any hope in the midst of that? Turn in your Bibles to 2 Corinthians 12. I'm almost done here. 2 Corinthians 12. One person, one pastor, one book, one conference, one church cannot change this. We are weak. This is beyond our ability to change the course of it. And yet here in 2 Corinthians 12:7, we see a light that beckons us to come this direction. Apostle Paul having been afflicted by a messenger from Satan says this, he says, "So to keep me from becoming conceited because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations," he'd received revelations, been to the third heaven is what he's referring to in context there, he says, "a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me, to keep me from becoming conceited." In light of everything that we've said today, beloved, that electrifies me and draws me to say, "What do you have to say, Paul? You say that there is a messenger of Satan that was afflicting you? How did you respond to that?" Perhaps in Paul's response, Paul's principles, we can find something that gives us guidance. He specifically identifies Satan. We've said that we see Satan at work in our culture and its philosophical environment, we see Satan at work in the church. Then we need a word to help us particularly as we feel the great weakness of our ability to respond to it, to say nothing about the brevity of life in which to do it. He was harassed by Satan and what did he do? Verse 8, "Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave me." But it didn't leave but God said to Paul, verse 9, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.' Therefore," Paul says, "Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong."

The challenge of our culture, the challenge of the church, the challenge of the cosmic forces, beloved, should have one effect upon us. It is like it is a 40-foot wall of water coming on an ocean ready to break onto the shore and we can either look at that wave and let it drown us, or we can let it be the power and the force that casts us upon Christ so that we might become vessels in which he displays his strength in the midst of our weakness.

So what are we doing? What's our goal in response to all of this? Particularly within the church, beloved, our goal is this: our goal over time is no less than to change the fundamental way that men think. Our goal over time is to do nothing less than to change the fundamental way that men think. Our thinking is so messed up. It is so wrong. Our presuppositions are so out of whack and we've got to change that. I don't mind telling you, that's a spiritual goal beyond my ability. It's a spiritual goal that is beyond my lifetime. No man, no single church can do this alone.

When you come back on Sunday, I'll lay forth the direction that this is all going to take next Sunday, and I want to say this. I don't know what God will do as we pursue this course. I don't know if he'll bless our effort at all. I don't know if there will be any visible success to it at all. I don't control that. But I know one thing for certain: the God of Nehemiah who enabled him to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem, he's our God today. The God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Christ who raised from the dead, he's alive today and he said and promised, "I will build my church." The third person of the blessed Trinity, the Holy Spirit, is alive and active in his people. He inspired the word of God. He works

through the word of God. We can appeal to him and ask for help and expect him to respond. But someone, beloved, in the midst of this chaos, someone has to pick up a brick and say, "Let's get started." That's what we intend to do in the months to come at Truth Community Church. We're going to pick up our brick and get started. I'll lay out the plan next week. Come and join us. It's for the cause of truth and truth matters.

Let's pray together.

Gracious Father, we think with the words of the psalmist in Psalm 90, our days pass away under your wrath, we bring our years to an end like a sigh, we're weak, we're mortal, the years of our life are 70 or even by reason of strength 80 and yet their span is but toil and troubles, they are soon gone and we fly away. Father, how then is it possible to even consider these matters? It would be impossible, it would be overwhelming but for the promises of your word, but for the promise of your Spirit, but for the glory of Christ. And so, Father, with that same psalmist as we have tried to earnestly soberly consider the culture and the church around us, Father, for the sake of your glory, for the sake of your truth, for the sake of the Lord Jesus Christ, we pray that you would make us glad for as many days as you have afflicted us and for as many years as we have seen evil. Let your work be shown to your servants and your glorious power to their children. Father, as we pick up the brick, let the favor of the Lord our God be upon us and establish the work of our hands upon us, yes, establish the works of our hands. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

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