

Series: *What Does It Mean to be a Scripture-Driven Church?*

Title: "Seven Marks of a Scripture-Driven Church" (part 2)

Speaker: Rev. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 3/22/2009

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In our last message, we started to examine seven key characteristics of a Scripture-driven church. As we continue today, I want to begin to develop each of these seven characteristics more fully, from the pages of Scripture.

So we begin with the first mark of a Scripture-driven church: The people and leaders of a Scripture-driven church are committed to Scripture alone as their authority. They are committed to Scripture alone as their authority – the sole and final authority in everything.

They say, as the Lord said through the prophet Isaiah, "To the law and to the testimony!" In Isaiah chapter 8, the prophet challenged the apostate house of Judah with these words: He said, "Go 'to the law and to the testimony! If anyone does not speak according to this word, it is because there is no light in him.' " In other words, "Go to the Word of God alone as your authority – nothing else. If anyone doesn't want to be subject to the authority of the Word of God alone, it is because there is no light in him."

The idea in the original language is quite graphic. It means that in the mind of such a person, who does not want to be subject to God's Word, dawn hasn't come yet. Light hasn't come yet. In other words, if someone consistently does not want to be subject to the authority of the Word of God alone, you have

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every reason to think that such a person is not truly a believer. Being willing to be subject to God's Word is evidence of saving faith in Christ. Lack of that willingness is evidence that someone does not have saving faith in Christ. Now those are strong words. But this is God's Word.

And in First Thessalonians chapter two, the Apostle Paul commends the church at Thessalonica with these words, beginning at verse 13: "For this reason we also thank God without ceasing, because when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe." They welcomed the Word of God. They understood that the Word of God is the Word of God – not the word of men.

Scripture-driven Christians are committed to the authority of the Word of God. And it is a commitment that comes only because there is light in the soul. Commitment to the authority of the Word of God is the church's starting point.

How can you make profitable use of Scripture unless you are willing to submit to its authority?

How can you skillfully handle the sword of the Spirit for the battles of daily living unless you are committed to its authority?

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What's the use of reading and feeding on God's Word unless you are willing to submit to its authority?

What's the use of hiding God's Word in your hearts – absorbing Biblical truth, and committing Scripture to memory – what's the use, unless you are willing to submit to the Bible's authority?

What's the use of preaching, if the preacher isn't committed to the authority of the Bible? The people of a Scripture-driven church should demand that their pastor be a man of the Word, not a man of the world. God the Holy Spirit will only enable the preacher for sound preaching if he is committed to the authority of the Bible. And there will only be receptive listeners to sound preaching if the people in the congregation are committed to the authority of the Bible.

In all of these ways, the people and leaders of a Scripture-driven church are committed to Scripture alone as their authority. It is their sole and final authority. They are truly "People of the Book." So that's the first mark of a Scripture-driven church.

The second mark of a Scripture-driven church is this: The people and leaders of a Scripture-driven church conduct the ministry of the church according to

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God's eternal purpose as He has given it in Scripture, not according to man's purpose of the moment. Let me repeat that, and I hope you will listen carefully because this is so important: The people and leaders of a Scripture-driven church conduct the ministry of the church according to God's eternal purpose as He has given it in Scripture, not according to man's purpose of the moment.

Where do we find God's purpose for the church? We find it only in the Bible – no place else. And when we go to Scripture, what do we find is God's purpose for His church? We find two things, and two things only: God's enduring purpose for His church is to proclaim the Gospel to the unbelieving world, and to build up the saints in sound doctrine. Let me repeat that also: God's enduring purpose for His church is to proclaim the Gospel to the unbelieving world, and to build up the saints in sound doctrine. Those two things, and those two things only. Our authority for this is the Lord Jesus Christ himself.

Mark chapter 16, verse 15 – "Go into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature."

Matthew chapter 28, verse 18 – "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples from among all the

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nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you."

Proclaim the Gospel to the world, and build up the saints in sound doctrine. That's it. Nothing else. The church's legitimate work comes under those two headings, those two purposes. And that, dear friends, is plenty for any church to do. If the church does those two things, and it does them well, those two things will occupy all of its time. There won't be time for anything else that God did not ordain.

You see, God has set a boundary for the church. In Second Corinthians chapter 11 and verse 3, the Apostle Paul calls that boundary "the simplicity that is in Christ." "The simplicity that is in Christ." The word "simplicity" in that context speaks of single-mindedness – a single-minded focus on the thing that really matters. A single-minded focus on God's plan and God's purpose for the church, in Christ. "The simplicity that is in Christ."

Don't be corrupted from that simplicity, Paul says. Don't let anything pull you away from that simplicity. But our human pride doesn't like simplicity. Our sin nature doesn't like boundaries. Our flesh does not like restrictions. And the influences of the purpose-driven church movement and the emerging church

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movement have caused the church not simply to throw off Biblical boundaries – they have caused the church to believe that it is necessary to operate outside of God’s Biblical boundaries, or else the church isn’t going to be successful. As we said last week, man in his flesh falls into the trap of thinking that he owns the church, and sinful man says, “I’m going to do things my way.”

Dear friends, let’s get this right: There is nothing wrong with God’s boundaries. God erected boundaries for the life and ministry of the church in order to protect the church from spiritual danger. You put up a guard rail at the edge of a road to keep people from driving over a cliff. That’s a good boundary. And God has erected those kinds of boundaries for the life and ministry of the church in order to keep the church on-message, and on-mission, and on the spiritual battlefield. The problem of getting off-message, and off-mission, and on the sidelines as far as God’s eternal purpose is concerned, is not a new problem. We saw that last week in the church at Corinth.

I’d like to take the next few minutes to talk about an example from more recent times. I want to tell you what happened to Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones and the church that he pastored at Sandfields in the country of Wales. When Dr. Lloyd-Jones came to this church as its pastor, he found a church that was off-message, and off-mission, and on the shelf as far as God’s eternal purpose was

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concerned. The Sandfields church was following all of the prescriptions of the church-growth experts. The church and its leaders were involved in politics. They were involved in entertainment. They had organized church sports teams. They held sacred and secular music concerts. They organized a dramatic society. And they set up church-sponsored organizations that promoted traditional moral values. And, many other initiatives. It sounds like the church in the early 21st century, doesn't it? But this happened 80 years ago – 1927. Some of the problems in the church that we think are so new, aren't really new. Man in his flesh keeps re-inventing the same problems.

Well, many people were disappointed and even got angry at Martyn Lloyd-Jones, because when he came to the Sandfields church he did away with all of these things within a few weeks' time. The people and leadership of the Sandfields church were interested in numbers, and they thought the things they were doing would increase the numbers. But much to their surprise, much to their consternation, Martyn Lloyd-Jones expressed no interest in numbers as such. He dismissed the existing array of programs and initiatives as a waste of the church's time and resources. When the men of the church board asked him what they should do with the stage that had been constructed for the church's entertainment programs, Dr. Lloyd-Jones replied that they could tear it down

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and heat the building with it! (They didn't do that. Instead, they donated it to be reconstructed in the local YMCA. But they did get rid of it.)

Martyn Lloyd-Jones saw that the real problem of the church was not ignorance of the needs of contemporary society. The real problem was ignorance of the power of God and of His Word. He saw that the church's confused array of outreach programs relied on the power and ingenuity of man, not the power of God. And he saw that these things were a poor substitute for genuine Christian ministry that relied on the power of the Word of God and on God the Holy Spirit. So Martyn Lloyd-Jones re-focused the church's attention on the simplicity of prayer, Bible study, and Gospel preaching. This was a radical approach for that time. And sad to say, it's a radical approach today. But his radical approach produced radical results. It produce a changed church, because it produce changed lives.

And that came about because Martyn Lloyd-Jones backed up this revolutionary change in focus with revolutionary preaching. In that day, many pastors attempted to attract an audience by trying to be relevant to the perceived needs of modern man. Bible-based, doctrinally-rich sermons were out of fashion. What was in fashion were Sunday morning talks. The conventional wisdom of the time was that the most successful pastor was the

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man whose "sermon" didn't sound like a sermon. So the model pastor of that day would give a little Sunday morning talk on things like current social problems, how to improve interpersonal and family relationships, how to manage your money, how to be a better leader, and so on. And he might toss in the occasional Bible passage or mention of Jesus, alongside quotations from poets, philosophers, politicians, novelists, educators, and newspaper columnists. It was not uncommon for pastors to invite leading politicians and public figures to speak in their services, even though those public figures might not actually be Christians. The idea was to draw a crowd – anything to draw a crowd. Again, remember that this was 80 years ago. The things we see in our time are not new. Only the setting is different.

But Martyn Lloyd-Jones' approach to preaching was radically different. His preaching was exclusively from the Bible. His preaching was sharply focused on the text. And his preaching was highly doctrinal. At the same time, his preaching was also highly practical. On his first Sunday, he preached from 2 Timothy 1:7, "For God has not given us the spirit of fear, but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind." And beginning that very first Sunday morning, he started to teach the people of Sandfields church how to think. He taught them to base their thinking in every area of life and ministry on the infallible Word of

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God, not the wisdom of fallen man. The popular preachers of the time were going to great lengths to be "relevant" – so they thought. But they were giving their hearers nothing so truly relevant as this. The preaching at Sandfields was revolutionary preaching, and people soon began to take notice.

Martyn Lloyd-Jones never "dumbed down" his message. But he never preached above his hearers either. It was said that everyone went away from his sermons knowing exactly what he had meant. In later years, Martyn Lloyd-Jones went through a time of serious illness. He received many get-well letters. But one of the letters he treasured the most, expressed the hope that he would soon be back in the pulpit, because, the writer said, "You are the only preacher I can understand." He especially prized this letter because it was written by an eleven-year-old girl.

From day one, the people of Sandfields church realized that the new preacher was challenging them to the core of their souls. And slowly at first, but soon with increasing momentum, God used such preaching to bring results that the church-growth experts could not understand. They could only shake their heads. But always, Dr. Lloyd-Jones reminded his people that the results were the work of the arm of God, not the arm of flesh.

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He wasn't being different merely for the sake of being different. The revolution at Sandfields was highly practical. He understood that, yes, the conventional wisdom about church growth could produce near-term numerical success. But he also saw that it produced long-term spiritual failure. And he understood the simple but profound reason why the conventional wisdom ultimately produces failure: It is built on the wrong foundation. It is plainly contrary to the Word of God. And God only truly blesses what He ordains in His Word.

Just as the Lord Jesus Christ had violently driven the merchants and moneychangers out of the temple, Martyn Lloyd-Jones unapologetically cleared the Sandfields church of the trappings of conventional human wisdom. He set the stage for the only kind of success that would mean anything in time or eternity. And that was success not on human terms but on God's terms. It was success that was brought about by *the growth of a Scripture-driven church*.

And what were the results? Well first of all, there were some surprises. A number of people within the church who thought they were Christians, thought they were saved, came to realize that they were not saved. The first result was that people within the church came to Christ. One of those people was Martyn Lloyd-Jones' own wife. Another was the leading elder of the

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church. And then the wave of conversions began to spread into the surrounding community. Within a relatively short time, the membership of a church that had dwindled to less than 100, increased to nearly 500. And within eight years' time, Martyn Lloyd-Jones was preaching to crowds of 7,000 and more in various parts of Wales and England.

Word of the revolution at Sandfields quickly spread, and men from other churches came to try to find out the "secret" of its success. Some went away disappointed when they found out that the only "secret" was to preach the Word and rely on the Spirit of God for the results, rather than relying on human innovations. But other men got the message. And they went home motivated – motivated to emulate the attitude and practice that they saw at work in the Sandfields church.

Dear friends, this is the attitude we need today. This is the practice we need today. The people and leaders of a Scripture-driven church not only understand God's enduring purpose for the church, they not only operate within those boundaries. They understand that the church does not exist to do other things. They are not corrupted, they are not perverted, from the simplicity that is in Christ. The people and leaders of a Scripture-driven church conduct the ministry of the church according to God's eternal purpose as given in Scripture,

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not according to man's purpose of the moment. That's the second mark of a Scripture-driven church.