

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

Title: "Seven Marks of a Scripture-Driven Church" (part 4)

Speaker: Rev. Paul M. Elliott

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The sixth mark of a Scripture-driven church: The people and leaders of a Scripture-driven church practice Bible-based evangelism. They practice Bible-based evangelism. They say, with the Apostle Paul in Romans chapter 1, verse 16, that they are not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ, because it and it alone is the power of God unto salvation. And they preach the one true Gospel in its fullness. That's how Jesus preached the Gospel throughout His earthly ministry. That's how Peter preached the Gospel on the Day of Pentecost. That's how Stephen preached the Gospel to the religious leaders of Israel. That's how Paul preached the Gospel throughout the Roman world. The one true Gospel in its fullness.

And what is that Gospel? Remember, we said in an earlier message that the Corinthian church got so far off the track that the Apostle Paul actually had to remind them what the Gospel really is. He had to re-teach the Gospel. That's the context of the familiar passage in First Corinthians chapter 15, verse 1 through 8, where Paul says this:

"For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He was seen..."

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That's the Gospel in its fullness. Not a therapeutic "gospel" that focuses on "acceptance" and "affirmation" but turns a blind eye to mankind's total depravity. Not a watered-down "gospel" that focuses on self-esteem but says nothing about the Biblical definition of sin, the eternal consequences of sin, and to the immense price that had to be paid for sinners' redemption by the Son of God Himself. Not a false "gospel" that leaves people feeling better about themselves, but still eternally lost. The people and leaders of a Scripture-driven church preach about sin. "Christ dies *for our sins.*" They preach about deliverance from the wrath to come, God's wrath against sin. They preach about the great ransom that has been paid for sinners. They preach about the need for repentance from sin. The Gospel is only good news to those who come face to face with the reality of the bad news, the terrible news, about their own hopelessly lost and sinful condition.

The people and leaders of a Scripture-driven church are not ashamed of the one true Gospel of Christ. They recognize, as Paul tells us in First Corinthians chapter one, that it is through the foolishness of preaching – the preaching of that one true Gospel – that the Spirit of God brings souls into the kingdom. Not through strategies of our own invention. Not through appeals to the sinful pride of man. Not through compromise of the message. Not by watering-down

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the message. Not by dumbing-down the message. A Scripture-driven church preaches the one true Gospel in its fullness, and it rejects all false gospels. That's the sixth mark of a Scripture-driven church.

The seventh mark of a Scripture-driven church is this: The people and leaders of a Scripture-driven church answer anti-Christian positions with apologetics – that is, a clear, Biblical defense of the faith – not with apologies or accommodation. They answer anti-Christian positions with a clear, Biblical defense of the faith – not with apologies or accommodation.

They do this in love, but they do it with the understanding that there is no such thing as neutrality. The Bible says that there are only two categories of people – saved and lost, the friends of God and the enemies of God. The people and leaders of a Scripture-driven church understand that everybody, saved and lost, has presuppositions. But they understand that presuppositions based on the Bible are the right presuppositions, and all others are wrong. Any position that is not a Biblical position is an anti-Christian position. Move one inch outside God's Biblical boundaries, and you are in anti-Christian territory. Scripture-driven Christians answer anti-Christian positions on the rock-solid authority of God's Word.

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But in order to be able to answer anti-Christian positions, you have to know your own position. The missionary atheists, and the Roman Catholic apologists, and the Muslim missionaries who have come to this country can often quote more of the Bible than the average Bible-believing Christian. When you get into a discussion with them, they can tie you up in knots if you don't know your Bible, if you aren't rooted and grounded and growing in sound doctrine. They know the right things to say, to make the average Christian who doesn't know his Bible as well as he should, look absolutely foolish.

First Peter chapter 3 and verse 15 – "Sanctify the Lord God is you hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear." "Always be ready" – the idea in the original is, "always be prepared." "Always be prepared" to do what? "To give a defense." The word translated "defense" or "answer" is the Greek word *apo-logia*. It's the word from which we get our English word *apologetics*. It speaks of a reasoned statement, a reasoned argument, a reasoned explanation.

In other words, always be prepared to give a reasoned explanation for the hope that is within you – your faith in Christ. This is why I believe that the Bible alone is the Word of God. This is why I believe that God exists. This is where I find out how a perfect creation was plunged into chaos. This is why I

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believe that Jesus Christ is God Himself. This is why I believe that man is a sinner on his way to Hell, and needs to be saved. This is why I believe that salvation is by grace alone, through faith alone, in Jesus Christ alone. This is why I believe Jesus Christ is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. This is why I believe that no one can come to God the Father except through Christ. This is why I believe that all other religions are wrong, and lead men to Hell. This is why you, my unbelieving friend, why you need to turn to Christ. This is the way in which we give an answer. But if we are going to be ready to give an answer, we need to know the answers. We need to be immersed in the Word of God.

The people and leaders of a Scripture-driven church answer anti-Christian positions with apologetics – a clear, Biblical defense of the faith – not with apologies or accommodation. And they are able to do so because they know their Bibles, and they stand on the Bible's authority alone. That's the seventh mark of a Scripture-driven church.

What does God do when the church is driven by His Word? What does God do through a Scripture-driven church? Let's consider what the New Testament says.

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Acts chapter 4, verse 4 – In the days immediately after the coming of the Holy Spirit upon 120 believers in Jerusalem at Pentecost, when they began to preach the Gospel, we read this: "Many of those who heard the Word believed, and the number of the men came to be about five thousand."

And just a short time later, in Acts chapter 6, verse 7, we read this: "The Word of God spread, and [as a result] the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the [Jewish] priests" – men who had been the enemies of Christ during His earthly ministry – "a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith."

Acts chapter 8, verse 4 – A short time later, the church at Jerusalem is being scattered because of persecution. They are fleeing to other parts of the Roman world because of persecution. And what do they do, as they go? What do they do, even in the face of persecution? Acts chapter 8, verse 4: "Those who were scattered went everywhere, preaching the Word." "Preaching the Word."

And then a bit later we come to Acts chapter 12, verse 24: "The Word of God grew and multiplied." The church grew and multiplied because the Word of God grew and multiplied – the seed of the Word was sown, and it bore fruit.

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And then some time later, we come to Acts chapter 19 – The Apostle Paul has come to the city of Ephesus. And we read in chapter 19, verse 8, that Paul “went into the [Jewish] synagogue [at Ephesus] and spoke boldly for three months, reasoning and persuading concerning the things of the kingdom of God.” Paul was ready to give an answer for the hope that was within him. And then a few verses later we read that there was a moving of God among those in Ephesus who had made their living by practicing spiritism, the black arts. And we come to verse 18, and we read this:

“And many who had believed came confessing and telling their deeds. Also, many of those who had practiced magic [that is, spiritism] brought their books together and [they] burned them in the sight of all. And they counted up the value of them, and it totaled fifty thousand pieces of silver.” That was over 160 year’s wages for the average laborer in that day – a phenomenal amount of money. At today’s minimum wage rate, it would be about two and a half million dollars.

Two and a half million dollars’ worth of the most sinful kinds of books – burned in the fire. And burning the books meant that these people were giving up their livelihood – and spiritism was a very lucrative profession in the Roman world. These people were giving it all up. They were giving up a multi-

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million-dollar business, in modern terms. Turning their backs on it. What was happening? Well in the next verse, Luke under the inspiration of the Spirit tells exactly what was happening – chapter 19 and verse 20: "In this way, the Word of the Lord grew mightily and prevailed."

Later in his life, Paul wrote his second epistle to Timothy. And we read this in 2nd Timothy chapter 2, verses 8 and 9. He said that because of the Gospel he suffered trouble and was treated as an evildoer, even to the point of being in prison and in chains. But, he said, "the Word of God is not chained." The Word of God is not chained! The world may do what it wants, as God allows it. The world may look on Christians as evildoers – and we certainly see that attitude in our society today. But, Paul says, let the world do its utmost to suppress the truth – the Word of God is not chained! It is the Word of God that is alive, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword! It is the Word of God that gets to the heart of the issues of life. It is the Word of God that is the critic of the thoughts and intents of the heart.

And God has promised this, as we read in Isaiah chapter 55 and verse 11: "My Word that goes forth shall not return to me void" – it shall not return to Me empty, it shall not return to Me without fruit, without result. "But it shall accomplish what I please, and it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it."

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The people and leaders of a Scripture-driven church understand that God honors His Word. They understand that it is as the Word prospers and grows and prevails, that the church prospers and grows and prevails. It is as the Word of God accomplishes His purpose, that the church accomplishes its God-ordained purpose.

The early church understood this. And it was as the early church stayed on-message, on-mission, and on the battlefield, that the Word of God accomplished great things by the power of the Holy Spirit.

And Martyn Lloyd-Jones understood this when he came to Sandfields and found a church that was off-message, off-mission, off the battlefield, and on the shelf as far as God's purpose was concerned. He understood that his mission as a pastor was to get the church back into the Word, and to pull down all of the things that had been built up over time that were contrary to the Word. And the result at Sandfields was a revolution. The revolution started inside the doors of the church. And it spread to the surrounding community.

Lives were changed. Hardships were eased. Increasing numbers, even non-Christians who observed what was happening without the full understanding of a mind transformed by the Gospel, saw that the revolution at Sandfields was

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a far more effective answer to the problems of the times than anything else the church had proposed or tried.

Many people today do not realize that in the 1920s and 1930s, the country of Wales was very close to becoming a foothold for Communism in Western Europe. But by the late 1930s, Martyn Lloyd-Jones was being credited as one of the two men most responsible for saving the nation of Wales from Communism. God's Word did not return empty. It accomplished His purpose. That purpose began with the changing of individual lives in an insignificant and struggling church. And that purpose grew to encompass the rescue of an entire nation from the dark night of Communism. And God's purpose was accomplished not through political effort, but through loyalty to the authority of God's Word. And it began in a single local church.

Dear friends, let me conclude this series by saying this: There is no telling what God can do if we His people repent of our un-Scriptural ways. The hand of God's righteous wrath is poised against this nation, and rightly so. This nation has fallen into great evil. And I believe the main reason is that the evangelical church in this country has become the church unplugged, the church uncertain, the church ineffectual.

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It is bad enough that God's Word has been pushed aside in the public square. But in our time, the Word of God has been pushed aside within the evangelical church. We need to repent. Often we find in the pages of the Word of God and in the history of the world that God was merciful to a nation because of a faithful remnant. I do not think it is too late for God's remnant to plead for His mercy. But we must be a faithful remnant.

Why is our nation in the shape it's in? The Bible has lost its influence. One more passage of Scripture, and then we close. Nehemiah chapter 9, verse 26. Here's the setting: A remnant of the children of Israel have returned to land from captivity in Babylon. And we read in verse one of Nehemiah chapter 9 that all the people assembled together "with fasting, in sackcloth, and with dust on their heads...and they stood and confessed their sins and the iniquities of their fathers." And what was the iniquity that they confessed? We find the heart of it in verse 26 – "Lord, we rebelled against You, and we cast Your law" – Your Word – "behind our backs." We cast Your Word behind our backs.

Here's the picture: A man is walking along a road and he has the Word of God in his hands. And as he is walking along, he throws God's Word over his shoulder and lets it fall to the ground behind him, and he just keeps on walking. Utterly forsakes God's Word. Tosses it behind him. Rejects it. Treats it

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as useless. Dear friends, as a nation, that's exactly what we've done. This nation has been blessed above all nations in having God's Word in our hands. But we've taken God's Book, and we've tossed it over our shoulder, and we've just kept on going – farther and farther away from God's Word. The influence of the Bible on this nation over the last 50 years has gone down, down, down.

And why has this happened? I submit to you that the Bible lost its influence in the nation, because the Bible lost its influence in the church. That's where the problem began. It began long before Madalyn Murray decided to go to court to get prayer and Bible reading thrown out of the schools. It began long before the Supreme Court ruled that killing her unborn child is a woman's constitutional right. It began long before governments began passing laws that make Christian apologetics a hate crime.

The Bible subsequently lost its influence in the nation because the Bible first lost its influence in the church. The church has gone after all kinds of other things. In many ways, the church has tossed the Bible over its shoulder just as ancient Israel did. And that's where the problem must be solved – in the church. But the answer to the political and economic and moral and social crises of our times is not for evangelicals to organize more political pressure groups. The answer is not for evangelicals to become involved in a wider range of so-called

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faith-based initiatives. The answer is not for evangelicals to seek empty promises from political candidates. And the answer is not for the evangelical church to reinvent itself to try to please the world.

The answer to the crisis of our times is submission to the Word of God. We need to repent. We need to go back. We need to go back and pick up God's Word that we've so lightly cast aside. And we need to get back into the Word. That's what ancient Israel did in the book of Nehemiah. We read in that same chapter, chapter nine, that during this time of repentance the entire remnant stood and heard the Word of God read and explained to them for a number of days for six hours a day, and they spent another six hours confessing their sins and worshipping the Lord their God in the proper way. True repentance. True worship. True turning to the Word of God.

And that true turning to the Word of God meant that the Israelites saw that they needed to make some hard decisions. They had to give up practices, and associations, and relationships that were contrary to God's Word. It wasn't easy. Many tears were shed. But they did it. And God blessed them for it, and God re-established the nation, because the remnant repented.

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God's warning to the nation of Israel in Second Chronicles chapter 7 and verse 14 is also God's warning to His church today: "If My people who are called by My name" – He's speaking not to the nation as a whole, but to the people of God, God's remnant within the nation. "If My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways" – not the wicked ways of the nation, but the wicked ways of the people of God – "then I will hear from Heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land." Dear friends, as the church goes, so goes the nation. The healing of the nation will begin with the repentance of the church. We need to become, once more, the Scripture-driven church.