

# The Purpose of the Church

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**Bible Text:** Matthew 16:13-18  
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Matthew 16. I know the folks at Grace Baptist Church in Selkirk are watching or either going to take the tape and watch. Do you know if they're not watching live? I think they're watching live so if I could say anything to a new pastor at a church, this is what I would say. Thirty plus years ago, I troubled about what I was seeing and hearing about "how to do church" and what churches were supposed to be like, I just poured myself into the Scriptures and said, "Well, if I was to have one message, one single message that gave a good biblical systematic overview of the purpose and work of the local church, what would it look like?" and that's where this came from. But I pulled the thoughts of how important this was to have from this episode in the Gospels, Matthew 16, beginning in verse 13.

13 Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, He was asking His disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" 14 And they said, "Some say John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; but still others, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets." 15 He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" 16 Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." 17 And Jesus said to him, "Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is in heaven. 18 I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it."

Now let's stop right there. Peter's doing exceptionally well. Peter has gotten up to the plate and he's hit a grand slam home run. Jesus said, "Who do people say I am?" They said, "They think you're great. They think you're like one of the prophets." He said, "Okay, but who do you say that I am?" And Peter said, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." Then Jesus said, "Just recognize, Peter, that you didn't come up with that on your own. Flesh and blood did not reveal this to you. A sovereign God through the work of his Spirit has caused you to understand the truth of who I am. Flesh and blood did not reveal this to you but my Father who is in heaven." But now Peter's about to strike out. It's amazing how you can do great at one moment, blow it the next.

Look at verse 21,

21 From that time Jesus began to show His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised up on the third day. 22 Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, "God forbid it, Lord! This shall never happen to You." 23 But He turned and said to Peter, "Get behind Me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to Me; for you are not setting your mind on God's interests, but man's."

So in verses 13 through 18, we see Simon Peter grasping that this is the Christ, this is the one that will build this new body of God's people, the church, the called-out ones who are God's, and Jesus even says to Simon Peter, "Upon that rock of truth that I am the Christ, the Son of the living God, I'll build my church." But when we get down to verses 21 through 23, Jesus begins to explain how the church would be built. "I'm going to Jerusalem. I'm going to be betrayed. They are going to severely mistreat me. They're going to kill me, then I'm going to rise again." Peter was deeply offended by the thought. "That's not the way it's gonna work. That's not the way your church is going to be built. We will never let that happen to you." To which Jesus turns back to Peter and says, "Get behind Me, Satan! You're thinking just like a natural man would think. That's just what men do when they come up with their own clever ideas of how God's going to do his work and that's what Satan wants. He wants men to come up with their own clever way to build God's church so you're thinking like Satan; you're thinking like a man, not as God. You're a stumbling block, Peter." Well, we know Peter was a true man of God but he wasn't out of the oven yet. He wasn't done yet. There were things he needed to understand.

So here Peter was, Brother Blake, here Peter was, to the folks at Grace Baptist Church in Selkirk, here Peter was, enthusiastic about God's work, enthusiastic about building God's church but not enthusiastic about building God's church God's way. They had come up with their own ideas, their own means, their own methods. If I could say anything to you, Brother Blake, I would say this and I'm going to say a whole lot more too: we do God's work, God's way, for God's glory. We don't get to get into God's work and do it our way because that leans to our glory, but when you do God's work, God's way, for God's glory, nobody can explain the results so he gets the credit for it and that's what we're striving for.

I was just reading about a super-prominent pastor in Baptist life just a few moments ago and saw all the unbiblical foolishness that was going on in his church, and all you can come away with, when you see what he's doing, by the way, the man is immensely talented, he's a fantastic communicator, he could run a Fortune 500 company, but when you go away from listening to him and watching what he's doing, do you know what you say? You say, "That's an amazing man." You're not prone to say, "He serves an amazing God." That's the problem and that's the problem Peter had. He knew how he could get this done for Jesus instead of just yielding to Jesus' way. Jesus said, "First of all, the foundation stone, I go to Jerusalem. I am to be forsaken of men, mistreated greatly and die on a cross. That's the way it's going to start and, Peter, you must accept that. Apart from that, nothing else matters."

You know, I read this or I had this quoted to me, a famous newspaper editor wrote some years ago, "Just when we need the church the most, it has become just like us." Have you noticed that, that really the secular culture is kind of put out when they find that we're becoming worldly? Now they'll rant and rail and demean us for our convictions and our standards but they still want us to have them. Just when we need the church the most, it has become just like us.

So, what, three decades ago I put down this biblical Purpose Statement for the Local Church. It's our purpose statement and to be honest studying over it again, you could use different words, different ways to phrase things but I still have no biblical reason to change anything. So we embraced this about three decades ago as a people that the purpose of Grace Life Church is to glorify God by obediently making an equipping disciples of Christ in the Shoals area and throughout the world by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Let's break this down one phrase at a time. First of all, the purpose of the church, Brother Blake, is to glorify God. For you and Destiny, if that apprehends your soul, you'll make it. If it doesn't, you won't. It's not worth it unless there's something in you that tells you when everything goes bad, when people are slandering your name, when they're putting a spin on everything you say to put you in the worst light, first of all, they did it to your Lord, but when all that's happening, you'll just rest back on that concrete foundation of the glory of God is worth it. That's why that must be first. You see, the needs of man must not be first. We can't say, "Well, men need the Gospel." Yes, they do and that's a powerful motivation but it's secondary to the glory of God because if you get to focusing on our purpose is to save souls, you are going to be tempted to find shenanigans and manipulations and shortcuts to "get that job done." And in Baptist and evangelical life, what have we seen? We've seen "the greatest pastors are those who are able to get the most people to make decisions," and that doesn't mean they're saved; it doesn't mean they are savingly converted, it just means they made a decision, they jumped through a hoop that the evangelist or the pastor threw out before them. But to glorify God means we want to see God build his church his way so that he gets the credit, not us. That's got to be the goal. Ephesians 3:21, "to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen."

Now when we talk about glorifying God, here's a couple of thoughts. To glorify God means we make the right or true estimation of him. You do not get to glorify God by proclaiming him or proclaiming about him what you feel is right about him, or what you feel is true about him. What you feel doesn't matter, what God says about himself is what matters. So we must have the right estimation which is what the Scripture says. We pull from Scripture in proper, grammatical, contextual exegesis of the text what God says of himself. We want to make the right or true statement or estimation of him and also we want to make much of that right or true estimation and that's what God's church is for, to make a true and great statement about God. We want to be a great stage, if you will, to show forth a truth of who God is and we want to say a lot about the truth of who God is, and it's wonderful beyond compare that part of the great glory of God is he's a God of

love and he's a God of grace. He's so full of love and grace he would save sinners and make them his own. So we do go after souls because that's one of the great ways. As a matter of fact, it is the greatest way God glorifies himself, by saving lost sinners and putting them in his church.

So the church, the local church, is about him. We need to have an adequate estimation of who he is that is from the Scripture, and a great presentation of who he is to the world around us. After all, the church, the Bible says, is Christ's prized possession. He buys it with a price. Acts 2:28 reminds us he purchased it with his own blood. Not only is it his prized purchase, the church is his building. In our own text here, Jesus said, "Upon this rock I will build My church." Now he did not say, "I will build your church," and he did not say, "You will build my church." He said, "I will build my church and I'm welcoming you to get in on it with me." This is his work. It's his prized purchase.

The Bible says it's his building, he builds it. The Bible also says it's his body, Colossians 1:18, "the head of the body, the church." Now when you make a prized purchase, it shows off something you've achieved; it glorifies you, in a sense. I don't mean necessarily in an evil sense but it makes a statement of you. When you build a great building or a great structure, it shows your skill, your craftsmanship. In the right sense, it glorifies you. It makes a statement of what you can do. And then what's your body for? Your body is to glorify your head. The Bible says he's the head of the church, the church is his body. Colossians 1:18, "He is also head of the body, the church."

Do you remember the illustration of the guys running in the Olympics? I like athletic events. I watched some track and field on television this afternoon and you know how it is when those guys run those 100 meter sprints, the reporter runs up to them and sticks the microphone up to them, and what they do is they take the microphone and they put the microphone down at the legs of that runner and say, "Legs, you ran so fast. Legs, you did so well. Legs, tell us how you did it." You've never seen that happen, have you? The legs did the work but they put the microphone at the head. The head gets the attention. The head gets the credit and that's what we are, we're the legs, we're the body of Christ so that the head can get the glory.

Grace Baptist Church, Brother Blake, that church is for the glory of God. You do your work but God might be made much of, and accurately so. If your church is talked about by everybody in town but it's because of the shenanigans you put on, then you're a miserable failure. And if your church is esteemed, maybe even sometimes criticized and mocked in town but you're doing a correct and accurate biblical estimate of God to the world, that's good.

Well, the church is his prized purchase, the church is his body, the church is his building, and then, fourthly, the church is his bride. He says, "I am the groom and the church is like my bride." In the biblical understanding, a bride completes the husband. She's a statement of his values, his principles, his character to the world. That's why she takes his name. That's why all of this feminism and this progressive movement make women like men and make men like women is a lie from hell. It's not of God. It's not the way God made

things. The woman is the completion of the man. She's the outshining. She brings glory to his name and to his character and to his reputation. So we resubmit ourselves as Grace Life Church of the Shoals and we challenge Grace Baptist Church in Selkirk, and Brother Blake I challenge you, to make sure your commitment and your pastorate is God must get the glory and we do that by doing God's work, God's way.

Remind ourselves it's not the deacon's church. It's not the elder's church. It's not the church leadership board church. It's not the denomination's church. It's not the majority vote church. It's Christ's church. It's his bride, and by the way, there are some deacons in a lot of churches that need to get their hands off the bride of Christ. It's not yours. There is going to be a lot of accounting at the judgment bar of God for men who sought power and control over God's church and they were not qualified and their motives were not correct. It's his and it's for his glory.

Well, secondly in our statement. The purpose of the church is to glorify God. How are we going to do that? Well, secondly we say by obedience. The purpose of Grace Life Church, the purpose of Grace Baptist Church in Selkirk, wherever it is, it's to glorify God by obeying God, by obedience, and we bring Christ the glory he deserves through a total commitment to God's will for God's church. Brother Blake, God does not need any men to be any smarter in their church work, he just needs more men to be more obedient to the work of the church.

You know, it's really, the things God tells us to do, they're really not hard to understand, just men fear men too much to do it very often. It's clear what we're supposed to do and who we're supposed to trust. You see, the Bible is a thoroughly sufficient manual on the church, we just need to obey it. We don't need anyone else to tell us as a church if we're going to be effective, if we're going to reach the lost, that we need to learn about the special needs of the Baby Boomers. Then they told us now you've got to change everything because there's a new group, the Busters have come along. We've got to learn all the special unique feelings and desires and the way the Busters are designed. Then they said, wait a minute, there's another group that's come along. We're getting a little older. We've got to bring another group in. We've got to understand Generation X. We've got to understand how to reach Generation X because Generation X isn't like the Busters and the Busters aren't like the Boomers, and so you've got to change again. Then they said, wait a minute, we've got a new group. The Lost Generation has come along and you've got to have a unique, special, creative way to reach the Lost Generation. Then they said there's Generation C, and then there's the Millennials, and now there's Generation Y. How in heaven's name are you going to keep up with all of that? I'll tell you what you do, Brother Blake, you throw that mess away and you open this book and believe it and preach it and build the church on it. We don't need that stuff to build his church.

As I've said to you before, so many of our larger churches in our larger cities look like Six Flags Over Jesus. It's just a great big Christian amusement entertainment complex. Actually, I actually found this, I actually Googled the phrase "Six Flags Over Jesus." Go home and you'll find this and a prankster put up a sign on a highway, I think it was in Arkansas and I can't remember the name of the church. It's where Ronnie Floyd pastors.

He's a super-prominent Southern Baptist pastor. But they put up a board on April Fools Day that had Six Flags Over Jesus pointing to his church. Boy, that's a great statement from the community about your church, is it not? And what they're saying is that the church was just known for so many shenanigans and amusements and everything but true biblical ministry.

Now it's a little bit humorous but it's deadly serious. If you're going to bear the name of Jesus Christ and call yourself the bride of Christ, you need to be tenacious and sober and you're disciplined to be true to Christ. Now the church life has joys and it has happiness and it has sweetness. I'm telling you, this is the sweetest and happiest congregation you'll ever find on earth but we're dead serious about whose church it is. We're dogmatic about him having his will in his church. No, we're not dogmatic, we're bulldogmatic about his will being followed in his church. We want to be obedient.

Too often today when a family chooses a new church, they're just choosing another form of family recreation. They have the best programs for my kids, the best fun events for my teenagers, etc. etc. Nothing necessarily wrong with that but that's not why you choose a church. Those are at best secondary issues. Even way back in the middle part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Charles Haddon Spurgeon said this, "The devil has seldom done a cleverer thing than hinting to the church that part of their mission is to provide entertainment for the people with the view to winning them. Providing amusement for the people in the church is nowhere spoken of in the Scripture. It's just not a function of the church. The need is Bible doctrine so understood and so felt that it sets men aflame." Brother Blake, that's what I want you to do. I want you to get in that pulpit in Canada and I want you to be so prayed and so meditated up that the beautiful truths of God's word are aflame in your spirit and do you know what that'll do? That'll draw the right people to your church and it will repel the wrong people. If they're looking for Six Flags Over Jesus, they'll say, "We've got to go somewhere else." And if they're looking for God, they'll say, "We've come to the right place."

Obedience. John 14:15, Jesus said, "If you love Me, you will keep My commandments." The early church leaders said to their persecutors, Acts 5:29, "We must obey God rather than men." In Romans 16:19, Paul wrote to the church at Rome and, boy, may this be our reputation, Brother Blake, "the report of your obedience has reached to all." Isn't that what you want people to know about your church? When they say, "What do you know about that church? I'll tell you what I know about them: they obey God's word." Not that they're the biggest. Not that their music program is fantastic. That's okay. Not that their pastor's charismatic and a great communicator. That's fine if he is or if he isn't. But what the report was none of those things, the report was, "That's an obedient church."

You see, our goal – listen now – our goal is obedience, not success. Did you understand that? The goal is obedience and not success. Early in my ministry, if I had focused on success and not obedience, I would not know the success I know in ministry today. Did you hear that? I wouldn't know it. I'd be on my 10<sup>th</sup> reinvention of how to do church, looking to one man-made approach and gimmick after another. Think about this, by the way, men and religionists define success. If Jesus had focused on success, he would have

never gone to the cross. By the time he got to the cross, everybody stopped following him but he was obedient which ultimately God moves in and brings success.

So the purpose of the church, Brother Blake, to glorify God. That's where we start always. Now how are we going to do that? We're going to obey. We're going to look to God's word and obey what God says. Okay, if we obey God, what's the next step? Well, in a broad and general biblical sense, we call it making and equipping disciples. Whatever else we do and there are a lot of subcategories there we can't go into in this setting because this is a long message already and we don't need it to be longer tonight, but we want to look at making and equipping disciples because in a broad sense that's what we do. Jesus said in his final commission for he ascended back up into heaven, "Go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe," that's equipping them, "all things I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Jesus did not tell the church to go and get decisions. "How decisions did y'all have? How many got saved?" Really what they mean is how many respond to the manipulations of evangelists. That's decisionism. He didn't say go and get decisions, he didn't say go and get baptisms, he said go and make disciples. That's very very different.

We have all these isms today. What I mean by an ism is I mean those things that man has created that looks like the real thing but it's really a counterfeit. It's a pseudo-effect. We have decisionism or responsism or believism where people did what we told them but the Spirit hadn't changed them at all. Once again, that's why Baptists have millions on their roll that never even come to church. They made a decision but God hadn't changed them. Brother Blake, you've got to counsel with people and spend time, learn how to discern are there biblical evidences of regeneration in their lives before you bring them into church membership. If not, they're going to kill you one day because an unsaved man has no capacity to discern the spiritual leadership you're going to give.

But that's what's going on in too many churches today, these isms. Then they have revivalism. A guy comes in and has this meeting and they'll have all these decisions and they'll talk about all the numbers of all those who were saved. Now if God does it, I'm all for it. I just haven't seen the fruit of it. I can't tell you the times over 38 years I've stood down front here and somebody's come down the aisle crying crocodile tears, God's changed their life, only three and four and five weeks later, to never see them in church again. It takes more than a two or three minute counseling session at the front of the church to know if it's a real work of the Spirit of God.

So you've got decisionism or believism or responism which leads to a revivaism, not true revival, which leads to Christianityism which is not true Christianity. But do you understand in Baptist life we're four, five, six and seven generations of this stuff. I remember writing an article, I forgot what little magazine published it, but I talked about the goal of the church is to have a regenerate membership. Folks, that's as simple as saying a car ought to have tires. That's just basic. Regeneration must be true before you're added to membership. A true born-again experience, a true conversion. And one guy wrote to me just thrilled and excited that I said that, like it was some kind of

revolutionary, wonderful, new thought but there's nothing new about this, it's just that nobody does it. Nothing special about that. This is basic stuff, making and equipping disciples, not just getting decisions, not going through the motions, not getting people to jump through hoops.

Brother Blake and the church there in Canada, let me give you three things that come under, or let's say undergird the work of making and equipping disciples, or we might just say are God's means. 1. Congregational worship centered on preaching the word in the power of the Spirit. You have to work, you have to fight, you have to say no, you have to get people upset, to fight, to pour your energies here. Paul told Timothy that he was to exhaust himself in exposition and preaching and teaching the word of God. That's the cornerstone. If a church loses the pulpit, I don't care how wonderful it is, how special, how effective, nothing else matters if the pulpit is weak. That's the hub of the wheel, preaching the word in the power of the Spirit. That's the centerpiece of congregational worship. There's so much I could say there. I've got to move on.

Secondly, every member ministry through small groups. That's where your members begin to live out what God's taught them through the preaching of the word. That's how they expand out, incarnationally take out, flesh out, if you will, the truth of the preached word and that takes some hard work and do you know what? Because we've been mentoring that church for years, they now have a small group ministry. They didn't have one years ago. It's already rolling up there and I've been in the men's small group and there were some good men in there and I just know there's going to be great future there.

So preaching the word in the power of the Spirit, organizing the church so that every member can minister through a small group, and then what we call, then thirdly what we call family discipleship. Brother Blake, what I mean by that, and church in Canada what I mean by that, is you want Christianity to be real enough that they take it home. And you know, I'm not big on a real structured formal thing for family discipleship. Now people can do that and that's fine. I'm not saying it's wrong but I just think it's better to do more like the Old Testament text says that when you talk about these things when you rise up in the morning and when you walk along the way and when you sit down and when you lie down at night. In other words, make it incarnational, as a part of your family life. Moms and dads, talk about the verse you're working on this week in memorization. Talk about the Sunday school lesson or what the pastor preached. Just bring it up as life goes on and make it real at home as you live your life.

So the purpose of the church always first, glorify God. How are we going to do that? By obeying him. If we obey him, general speaking, what's our marching orders? Making and equipping disciples, preaching the word in the power of the Spirit, every member ministry through small groups and family discipleship. Now there are a lot of subpoints there we can't go into. That's the broad heading. Now let's go the fourth thing: what is the scope of the church's work? Where do we do this? That's why we say the fourth phrase, let me do it all again: the purpose of the church is to glorify God by obediently making and equipping disciples of Christ, and here's the new one, number 4, in the Shoals area and throughout the world, in Selkirk and throughout the world. That's the scope of our



ministry. When Jesus left or right before Jesus left as recorded in Acts 1:8 he said, "The Holy Spirit's power is going to come upon you and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem," and the Greek says it this way, "and at the same time in Judea, and at the same time in Samaria, and at the same time to the uttermost parts of the world. Don't stop witnessing in Jerusalem and go to the world, keep that going and just keep going out." You're to start in Selkirk and then to Manitoba and then to North America and then to the uttermost parts of the world, and they've already got their hearts wrapped around a good personalized, strategic, world missions ministry in partnership with Anchored in Truth, and I want you to keep building that for the glory of God because that's God's calling.

You see, the scope of the church's ministry can be no smaller than the scope of the heart of God. Did you hear that? Where's the heart of God? In John 8:12, Jesus is the light of the world. In John 4:42, Jesus is the Savior of the world. In John 3:16, Jesus loves the world. In 1 John 2:2, Jesus died for the world. You say, "Wait a minute, pastor. We know God saves those he's predestined, we know he saves those he elects." Well, like Spurgeon said, we don't know who those are. If God had put a red streak down the back of all the elect, we'd just go around and pull up their shirttail and see who the elect were. But he didn't do that so our command – now listen to me – our command is to preach the Gospel, urge every man everywhere to repent and believe. God will take care of who the elect are. Now he told us those truths to make us aware of how great and powerful he was but, Brother Blake, your job is to urge all men everywhere to repent and believe the Gospel. The warrant of faith is the Gospel. Everyone. Everywhere.

As a matter of fact, to go into all the world and preach the Gospel is the only command I know of that's given in five books of the New Testament. Matthew, Mark, Luke, John and Acts in some form or fashion say, "Go into all the world and preach the Gospel and make disciples," whatever it is. The early church, they're just getting started, they had a lot of challenges, they had people who were hungry almost starving to death, yet they had a global outreach. Acts 13:1-4, the first thing the church did at Antioch was to send out missionaries, Paul and Barnabas, and they must have done a pretty good job because when you get to Acts 24, Tertullus, a lawyer who the Jews had hired to accuse Paul, brings Paul before Governor Felix and this is what the lawyer brings as a charge against the Apostle Paul, he says, "They have stirred up dissension throughout the world." I love that. I love that. Don't you hope one day 20 or 30 years from now, Blake, somewhere on some remote part of the world where mostly unbelievers are, say, "We don't know who's done it but there's this church in Selkirk, Canada and they've caused everybody around here to talk about Jesus." That should be our goal.

We just can't back up or let up until the enemies of our Lord cry out in desperation like the enemies of the Lord cried out during the early church days as recorded in John 12:19 when the Pharisee said, "The world has gone after him." That was the mission efforts of the early church. They took the Gospel so many places, so often and kept talking about Jesus, the Pharisees in frustration said, "The world's gone after this Christ." Well, that's our goal. So we want to be faithful to take the Gospel to the ends of the earth.

The purpose of the church is to glorify God by obediently making and equipping disciples of Christ both in the Shoals area and throughout the world, and here's the final phrase, by the power of the Holy Spirit. If you miss that, you've missed everything. The Spirit is so foundational in all of it. In Matthew 28:20 as Jesus gave that final great commission to those disciples, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you," here it is, "and lo, I am with you always." Do you know what's significant about that commission? What's significant is those men just came off the greatest failure of their lives. They had all abandoned Jesus at the cross. Peter denied him three times. And they hadn't talked to him since so they're huddled there in their prayer meeting terrified that when he shows up, he may just banish them all to hell. He may just condemn them categorically. They felt like that's what they deserved and Jesus walks up instead of condemning them says, "Alright now, let's go! Go out there into all the world. Preach the Gospel to all the world. Make disciples of all the nations but just remember this, I am with you always." Here's what he's saying, "I've just let you see what you are, I've just let you see something about your strength and your power, now I want you to go out in my power." The Spirit's power. It's the Spirit that builds the church.

In Colossians 1:28 and 29, the Apostle Paul gives a summation of his ministry to the church at Colossae and he says, "We proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, so that we may present every man complete in Christ." Now listen now, "For this purpose also I labor," Paul says, "striving according to His power, which mightily works within me." Paul desperately threw himself in dependence on the Spirit of God using the Gospel to change men and women, boys and girls, and build God's church. That's why, Brother Blake, we don't need the gimmicks, we've got the Spirit. If you've got the Holy Spirit, you don't need the gimmicks. Gimmicks won't last.

I'm in my 38<sup>th</sup> year. A lot of these people have been here a long time. Do you know why they're still here? They are Spirit-wrought people. They didn't come because of Jeff Noblit's gimmicks. That would last about 18 months and they'd put their finger in there and say, "Hey, we heard about another church in town that's more fun than this one." But if the Spirit gets them, they're done. It's worse than cocaine. They're addicted. They can't go anywhere else. They want the Lord and they want the truth.

So we strive and labor, Brother Blake, to preach and teach and share God's truth with compassion but never with compromise, casting all of our hope and confidence on the Spirit of God to produce the results. And Blake, I'm commissioning you to do what you've seen here, and that is to go to that church and practice meaningful membership. Don't just fill your rolls with people that don't look like they love God and have a changed heart, look for the evidences of repentance and faith. When you bring people in by promise of letter, lovingly, always humbly, always but interview them about where they are with God and their commitment to the church covenant and to the church principles and the church doctrine. Make sure you continue to practice there following biblical accountability and biblical discipline within the church. Make sure you strive to teach them to be glory of God focused and not man focused, not man-centered but God-

centered. Make sure you strive to challenge them about world missions and taking this Gospel to the ends of the earth. Make sure you teach them that there's no such thing as a healthy vibrant church without every member ministry in small groups.

But you know, when you think about those things, not many people are talking about those things and people sometimes hear those kind of convictions and that scares them. They say, "How is that going to work? I mean, people aren't looking for that today. That's not really the going thing today." Well, if God's Spirit doesn't enable you, you're sunk. It'll take God to do that. That's not going to happen unless God empowers it and that's a great place to be, like Dr. Havner used to say, "a ship wrecked on God and stranded on omnipotence." If he doesn't do it, I'm sunk. If God's Spirit does not transform the hearts of men and women, young people, boys and girls, so that they will desire the truth you're preaching and building your church on, then it's not going to work. But if he does and he will, then you'll grow a congregation that didn't come to follow you, they came to follow the Christ you preach because the Spirit made him real through your preaching, and when they love him, they'll love you. I experience that and I want that for you and I know that's your heart and I know that's your conviction.

Well, Brother Blake and to the church, Grace Baptist Church in Selkirk, I'm confident if you'll give yourself faithfully and generously and joyously to these biblical principles and these truths to build God's church, whatever happens, all of you can stand before the Lord one day and hear him say, "Well done, good and faithful servant."