

Steps to a Stronger Church for the 21st Century

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INTRODUCTION

1. This is the product of 44 years of a testing mindset

2. When I talk about a church for the 21st century, I do not mean that we need a new kind of church for the 21st century.

- We don't need a new church for a new age. We don't need an emerging church.
- We need to re-evaluate what we are doing, but by God's Word alone.
- *Not evaluate by the Church Fathers.* They didn't add one iota of truth to the New Testament Scriptures. Hank Hannegraff joined Greek Orthodox because of the "fathers."
- *Not evaluate by Reformed Theology.* John Calvin didn't understand the New Testament church. His concept of the church came more from Augustine than from Paul. Calvin said, "If I were inclined to compile a whole volume from Augustine, I could easily show my readers, that I need no words but his" (*Institutes*, Book III, chap. 22). He said, "Augustine is so wholly with me, that if I wished to write a confession of my faith, I could do so ... out of his writings" (Calvin, "A Treatise on the Eternal Predestination of God," trans. by Henry Cole, *Calvin's Calvinism*, 1987). I don't consider Calvin a safe guide to anything pertaining to the church or theology.
- *Not evaluate by the old-time Fundamentalists.* Whereas we should understand the fundamentalist movement and learn from it, it isn't the standard. Fundamentalism as a movement was in error in regard to many things, such as its denominationalism (with its politics and pragmatism), interdenominationalism, and the essentials in unity principle.
- *Not evaluate by the old Independent Baptists.* Though the Lee Robersons and J. Frank Norrises and John R. Rices had a lot of truth and took a good stand on many things, they are not our authority, and it is now obvious that their principles were not far-reaching enough to stand in this terrible age.

3. This is a passionate subject with me.

To help churches stand in the next generation is my passion. It is no small thing with me.

I am thankful that there was a sound church in Bartow Florida, in 1973, where I could begin my Christian life on a good footing.

What about my grandchildren? Will there be sound churches for them?

I've come here to teach 1000 men.

- What kind of men? Spiritually-qualified men (good Christian character and testimony); God-called men; well-trained men; men who are committed to God's word rather than tradition; humble men who can work with a team of leaders as we see in Acts 13; men of faith (don't plan only by the bank account); men who fear God more than man; men of spiritual wisdom and discernment; men of zeal for the truth (Ps. 119:128); men who are willing to walk alone if necessary for the truth's sake; men who are willing to reprove and rebuke sin and error; men who are willing to exercise discipline; men who are hard workers; men who are aggressive in evangelism; men who will repent of any aspect of church work that is not solidly Scriptural (every bit of pragmatism, every bit of traditionalism, every bit of being hasty about salvation, every bit of being careless about church membership, repent about not requiring

that which God requires--1 Co. 4:2; repent of accepting that which God hates--lukewarmness, worldliness)

4. My teaching is not based on theory or “armchair theology.”

I have sought God’s mind about the church for 44 years. I have been in the active ministry since the first year I was saved and have been a deacon, pastor, church planter, and Bible college teacher.

5. We are witnessing a collapse among Bible-believing churches.

In the last twenty years, we have witnessed the capitulation of hundreds of Bible-believing churches to a contemporary philosophy of Christian life and ministry.

This issue is a matter of life and death. In the next 20 years, very few IB churches will still be standing; the next generation will be completely contemporary in the vast majority of IB churches.

- What it will look like: very few if any life-changing conversions, powerless preaching, no separation from the world, no separation from false churches (already happening in the Philippines, Baptists Together), no sacred music, no clear warnings, biblical ignorance, no holy families, no holy youth, dying missionary vision

I have no doubt that *every church* that does not get much, much stronger will fall.

The downgrade, the erosion, is evident *everywhere*.

- I see it in preachers that I knew in the 1970s and 1980s, a large number of whom have gone in a different direction, and their children in the ministry have gone in a different direction.
- I see it everywhere I travel.
- I hear of it from hundreds of people who can’t find a decent church.
- All of my preacher friends who are standing testify that a great many of their friends are changing and moving in a weaker direction.

In 1970s, the two largest groups of IBaptists was BBFI and Southwide Baptist Fellowship

BBFI

The first group of fundamental Baptists to reject biblical separatism and to go in a contemporary direction.

Baptist Bible Fellowship International was founded in 1950 by 100 pastors and grew quickly. By 1969, enrollment in Baptist Bible College was 1,370, graduates totaled nearly 2,500, 1,594 pastors were listed in the Fellowship Directory, and 336 BBFI missionaries were ministering on 32 mission fields (Keith Bassham, “The BBFI - A History,” *Baptist Bible Tribune*, www.tribune.org/the-bbfi-a-history). Five of the 10 largest Sunday Schools in America were affiliated with the BBFI (Elmer Towns, *America’s Ten Largest Sunday Schools*).

In the late 1970s, Jerry Falwell, who was prominently associated with the BBFI, moved toward a radical ecumenism with his Moral Majority.

- By February 1986, he told *Christianity Today* that Catholics made up the Moral Majority’s largest constituency (30%).

- In his autobiography, *Strength for the Journey*, Falwell referred to “Catholic brothers and sisters in the Moral Majority” (p. 371).
- In an interview with the *National Catholic Register*, May 9, 1982, Falwell listed Pope John Paul II as one of the two “greatest men in my lifetime.” He did not give any warning about the pope’s false gospel that is cursed of God (Gal. 1:6-8).
- Falwell endorsed Chuck Colson’s 1992 book, *The Body*, which urged evangelicals to join forces with Roman Catholics and charismatics. Colson said, “... the body of Christ, in all its diversity, is created with Baptist feet, charismatic hands, and Catholic ears--all with their eyes on Jesus” (*World*, Nov. 14, 1992).
- In spite of this incredible compromise and error, Falwell remained in good fellowship with the BBFI and continued to speak at their meetings. Very, very few BBFI preachers publicly decried Falwell and his heretical thinking and practice.

In the 1990s, some prominent BBFI leaders supported the radically ecumenical Promise Keepers which promoted ecumenical unity between Protestants and Catholics.

- In 1996, for example, Billy Hamm, pastor of the Mountain States Baptist Temple, Denver, Colorado, spoke at a Promise Keepers seminar. Hamm had served five terms as treasurer of the Baptist Bible Fellowship, and in the late 1970s he had taught at BBFI-connected Pacific Coast Baptist Bible College.
- Again, there were hardly any voices lifted publicly against Hamm’s great compromise.

In 2002 Bethlehem Baptist Church in Fairfax, Virginia, hosted the annual conference.

- The music was led by a contemporary “worship team” composed of four women.
- Around that time Bethlehem Baptist dropped the “King James Only” clause from the by-laws, and the New Living Translation and other corrupt versions began to be used from the pulpit.
- The pastor sent out a letter to members saying, “With regard to dress and modesty issues, we enforce NO RULE on our folks. ... apparel issues are really of no concern to us.”
- The church’s Skate Night, which was sponsored by secular skateboarding companies, featured “throbbing Christian rock.”
- The church’s youth pastor in 2002 had an earring and promoted the rock band P.O.D.

SOUTHWIDE

Southwide Baptist Fellowship was founded in 1955 by Lee Roberson of Highland Park Baptist Church and was formerly one of the largest Independent Baptist preacher networks, with 3,000 members at its peak in the 1980s. In late 1960s, Highland Park was the third largest church in America with average attendance of 4,500; Tennessee Temple was the largest Ind. Baptist Bible college in the 1970s; 3,000 students when we attended.

- In April 2006, Tennessee Temple’s College Days featured Toddiefunk and the Electric Church rappers
- By 2007, the number of SBC speakers at Southwide equaled the number of Independent Baptists, and two contemporary musicians provided music, including one who had appeared on the Crystal Cathedral television program with Robert Schuller (Don Boys, “Rise and Fall of Southwide,” CSTNews.com, May 16, 2007).
- In 2008, Highland Park Baptist Church joined the Southern Baptist Convention.
- In 2012, Highland Park Baptist Church ceased to exist. The name was changed to Church of the Highlands. Jeremy Roberts said, “It’ll be the funnest church around” (“Chattanooga’s Iconic Highland Park,” *Chattanooga Times Free Press*, Sept. 10, 2012).
- In 2015, Tennessee Temple closed its doors.

The church that will be standing in 20 years is a biblical church, but it is stronger than most Baptist and fundamentalist churches have been in my lifetime. A true New Testament church is more spiritually alive, more holy, stronger, stricter and more serious about real discipleship than the *vast* majority of Independent Baptist churches.

It is time to get stronger rather than be content with the status quo. We should be going “from strength to strength” (Psa. 84:7).

Yet instead of getting stronger, most churches are loosening up, lightening up, eroding, weakening.

A CHURCH THAT IS STRONGER IN LEADERSHIP

A church will never rise higher than its leaders. Pastors set the agenda and spiritual temperature of the church.

- Lee Roberson, "Everything rises and falls on leadership."
- Church members I hear from that are in a dilemma because of weak pastors; what can they do?
- We teach people how to be good church members and how to be submissive to pastoral authority (e.g., *Keys to Fruitful Church Membership*), but it is very difficult when the pastors aren't biblically strong.

This is the fundamental of fundamentals.

We need God-called men; Biblically-qualified men (good Christian character and testimony); well-trained men (in the Bible and in other issues facing the churches); studious men; men who are committed to God's Word rather than tradition; humble men who can work with a team of leaders as we see in Acts 13; men of faith (who don't plan *only* by a bank account); men who fear God more than man; men of spiritual wisdom and discernment; men of passion for the truth (Ps. 119:128); men of vision and zeal for world missions and church planting; men who are willing to walk alone if necessary for the truth's sake; men who are willing to reprove and rebuke sin and error; men who are willing to exercise discipline; men who are hard workers; men who are aggressive in evangelism; men who will repent of church work that is not solidly Scriptural (e.g., pragmatism, traditionalism, haste, carelessness, lukewarmness, worldliness)

We need men who love Jesus Christ with first love passion (Re. 2:4-5).

- How can we have first love churches if we don't have first love preachers?
- Love is what God wants (18 times in Scripture, "Thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might," De. 6:5)
- God wants a love relationship with His people. The Prophets mention "love" 16 times ("I have loved you, saith the LORD," Mal. 1:2).
- Lack of love for Christ is why preachers aren't passionate students of the Bible, why they don't reprove properly and chasten and discipline (it is love that teaches us to do these things), why they are men followers (instead of Christ followers). why they fear the people more than God.

We need men who love the Bible preeminently (Psa. 119:128)

- This is the opposite of a pragmatist; I believe that 99 out of 100 IB preachers are pragmatists. This is a man who puts some human consideration (e.g., more numbers, more workers) before faithfulness to God's Word. (We can't be too careful about salvation, can't be too careful about church membership, can't be too strict about standards for workers, can't be too careful about music *because it would limit church growth*, etc.)

We need qualified men (1 Tim. 3 and Titus 1).

- We must be much more careful about the training and ordination of pastors.
- There should be a call and it should be tested Scripturally. "Test of a Pastor's Calling" (desire, life, ability, recognition, proving, fruit).

- The men must be properly trained (“as he hath been taught,” Tit. 1:9); in Bible study; in preaching; in evangelism; in discipling; in leadership; in training leaders.

We need men who will disciple their own families (1 Ti. 3:4; Tit. 1:6).

- This is *a qualification*.
- This is *an example* to the other men; a major task is to build the families
- This is *for fruit*. Then preacher’s greatest fruit is to see his children serve God and walk in His will. The fruit can carry on for generations.

We need men who are serious students.

- This is necessary to be qualified and effective. (The qualified preacher is strong enough in God’s Word to protect the flock, Titus 1:9-16; he is nourished up in good doctrine, 1 Ti. 4:6; he gives attendance to reading and to doctrine, 1 Ti. 4:13; he labors in the Word and doctrine, 1 Ti. 5:17; he is apt to teach, 1 Ti. 3:2; 2 Ti. 2:2, 24; he labors to rightly divide God’s Word, 2 Ti. 2:15; he preaches God’s Word with doctrine, 2 Ti. 4:2).
- This is necessary to be the kind of Bible preacher/teacher you must be to feed the church.
- This is necessary to make progress in learning for every part of the ministry (e.g., evangelism, music).

We need men who will turn the people away from sin (Jer. 23:21-22).

- This is done by reproof and rebuke (2 Tim. 4:2); both public and private.
- This is done by biblical standards for workers.
- This is done by biblical discipline (*The Discipling Church*)

We need men who will work together in ministry teams.

- This is clearly the Biblical pattern (12 apostles, Barnabas fetching Saul, Paul and Barnabas on first missionary journey, “ordained elders in every church” Acts 14:23, “the bishops and deacons” Php. 1:1)
- This is the first thing I have sought in every new church plant.
- There will always be a senior pastor; cannot be total equality of authority.

We plan to deal with the church’s leadership in a separate course entitled “The Preacher and His Preaching.”

A CHURCH THAT IS STRONGER IN PRAYER

Prayer is the spiritual dynamo of a church.

The Bible's Strong Emphasis on Prayer

Prayer is mentioned at least 415 times in Bible, 129 times in the New Testament

The great saints in the Bible were praying people (e.g., Enoch, Abraham, Hannah, David, Jeremiah, Daniel, Nehemiah, Paul, Lydia).

Prayer is one of the four foundational characteristics of the first church in Jerusalem ("they continued steadfastly in the apostles doctrine and fellowship, and breaking bread and prayer," Acts 2:42).

Prayer is to be first of all (1 Ti. 2:1-2).

Prayer was a major emphasis of Christ's teaching (Mt. 6:5-13; 7:7-11)

The apostle Paul mentioned prayer 25 times in his epistles.

James and John and Jude mentioned prayer

The Power of Prayer

Prayer changes things. "The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much" (James 5:16).

"No prayer no power, some prayer some power, much prayer much power."

Elijah's prayer stopped the rain for three years (Jam. 5:17).

Moses' intercessory prayer for Israel changed the course of history (Ex. 32:7-14).

Through prayer, we have seen people healed of sicknesses.

- Pancreatitis in 2014; vital signs and organs deteriorating quickly; the first four days was a fog of pain and misery; I was taken off of all food and liquids and fed only through an IV. The doctors said they had done all they could, but I wasn't improving. Prayer healed me; as soon as we sent out a notice and began receiving word that people were praying I began to heal. received calls and emails from 1,000 people in 37 countries. When I was still on oxygen because my lungs were not working properly, some men in the church gathered around my bed and prayed, and within 15 minutes my oximeter reading went from 60 to above 90 and I could breath normally without supplementary oxygen. The next day I walked out of the hospital.

Through prayer we have seen many people delivered from demons.

- Sambar was learning about the gospel when he decided to attend a Pentecostal church though we had warned him against this. When the people laid hands on him, he became demon possessed! On a bus ride afterwards, he forced the passengers to shout praises to Jesus, warning that if they didn't participate, he would kill them. Through prayer he was delivered of the demons and called on the Lord to save him. He attended Bible School and became a prayer.

Through prayer, the Maoist insurgency in Nepal was turned back. The insurgency gained strength year by year, from 1996-2006, and the Maoists vowed to turn Nepal into a communist state. More than 19,000 people died in the fighting and terrorism. They vowed to close the churches and turn the public schools into a Maoist indoctrination system. There was nothing to stop them. The king was overthrown; the army was powerless to stop the Maoist advance; the political parties were inapt and hopelessly divided in the face of the threat. Nothing but earnest, believing prayer can explain the fact that the Maoists gave up their goal and joined the political process within a democratic system.

Yet prayer is neglected in most Baptist churches.

Example of a praying church

Metropolitan Tabernacle of London during Charles Spurgeon's days is an example of a mighty prayer church. Thousands were saved with changed lives as evidence. The preaching was life-changing and the church was very aggressive in evangelism (e.g., 27 Sunday Schools and Ragged Schools ministering to over 8,000 children with 612 teachers), but the power was in the prayer.

Spurgeon called himself a Calvinist, but he was his own kind of Calvinist. He was disliked by the strong Calvinists of his day because he called on all men to be saved. (See the book *Spurgeon vs. Hyper-Calvinism* by Ian Murray.) He interpreted 1 Timothy 2:4 ("who will have all men to be saved") literally and didn't try to explain it by Calvinist theology.

"Shall we try to put another meaning into the text than that which it fairly bears? I say not. You must, most of you, be acquainted with the general method in which our older Calvinistic friends deal with this text. 'All men,' say they, 'that is, some men'; 'All men,' say they, 'that is, some of all sorts of men.' The Holy Ghost by the apostle has written 'all men,' and unquestionably he means all men. ... I was reading just now the exposition of a very able doctor who explains the text so as to explain it away; he applies grammatical gunpowder to it, and explodes it by way of expounding it. ... My love of consistency with my own doctrinal views is not great enough to allow me knowingly to alter a single text of Scripture. I would sooner a hundred times over appear to be inconsistent with myself than be inconsistent with the word of God. ... God forbid that I should cut or shape, even in the least degree, any divine expression. So runs the text, and so we must read it, 'God our Savior; who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth'" (C.H. Spurgeon, "Salvation by Knowing the Truth," *Park Street and Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*).

"Spurgeon regarded the prayer meeting as 'the most important meeting of the week.' He often said that it was not surprising if churches did not prosper, when they regarded the prayer meeting as of so little value that one evening in the week was made to suffice for a feeble combination of service and prayer meeting" (*Wonders of Grace: Original testimonies of converts during Spurgeon's early years*, p. 14).

"A.T. Pierson, who ministered at Tabernacle during Spurgeon's last illness, said, "This Metropolitan Tabernacle is a house of prayer most emphatically ... prayer is almost ceaselessly going up. When one prayer meeting is not in progress, another is. ... There are prayer meetings before preaching, and others after preaching. ... No marvel that Mr. Spurgeon's preaching has been so blessed. He himself attributes it mainly to the prevailing prayers of his people" (Ibid.).

Keys to Effectual Prayer

Praying ground
Praying in God's will
Praying in faith
Praying with boldness
Praying with fervency
Praying with persistence
Praying with fasting
Praying with prayer partners
Praying a lot

Praying Ground

Praying ground is to have a right standing before God in Christ and to consciously approach God on the basis of that standing.

“Before a word of petition is offered, we should have the definite consciousness that we are talking to God, and should believe that He is listening and is going to grant the thing that we ask of Him” (R.A. Torrey).

This is accomplished in the following ways:

I must be saved and know it.

I must be confident of my position in Christ (Ephesians 1:3).

I must walk in the light and confess my sins (1 Joh. 1:6-9).

When I am reckoning on my eternal relationship with God in Christ and when I am walking with Christ in the light in obedience and when I am confessing known sin, that is “praying ground”!

Praying in God's Will (1 John 5:14-15)

This is what it means to pray in Jesus' name. It is like using someone's checkbook or credit card (“buy a bag of rice and get yourself a candy bar”)

Biblical prayer is not demanding prayer. We must always pray “Thy will be done.” Prayer is not demanding; it is asking. This is the example that Christ gave in Gethsemane (Mt. 26:39). The child of God must always be ready to accept a red light from God.

Biblical prayer is not Word-Faith prayer, which is the supposed power to bring things into reality by naming and professing them (Kenneth Copeland exercising power of Hurricane Irma).

Biblical prayer is not imagining prayer (Paul Yonggi Cho - imagining a specific bicycle).

We can pray for anything good and right, but we need to focus our prayers on things that are clearly God's will. Then we can have confidence in prayer. We see this in Paul's prayers. He focused on evangelism, the salvation of souls, church planting, and spiritual power and blessing. When God has revealed that He wants to do a particular thing, and when I pray for that thing, I can have complete confidence that it will be done. For example:

- praying for laborers for God's harvest (Lu. 10:2)
- praying for protection from evil men (Ro. 15:31)
- praying for government leaders that we might lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty (1 Tm. 2:1-4)
- praying for spiritual wisdom (Col. 1:9; Jas. 1:5)
- praying to walk worthy of God's will (Col. 1:10)
- praying for spiritual fruit (Col. 1:10)
- praying to know God (Col. 1:10)
- praying for strength for the Christian life (Col. 1:11)
- praying for God's Word to have free course and to be glorified (2 Th. 3:1)

Focusing prayer on such things is powerful because God is totally inclined to answer. We can't be absolutely sure of a positive answer when we pray for money or health or a new carpet or a new auditorium, but we can be sure of a positive answer when we pray for things that are clearly revealed in Scripture as God's will.

Praying in Faith (Mr. 11:24; Jas. 5:15)

The prayer of faith does not mean I can have anything I pray for if I only have faith.

- We must compare Scripture with Scripture (1 John 5:14-15).

But the prayer of faith pleases God (Heb. 11:6).

- Christ greatly emphasized the role of faith in answered prayer.
- Consider the case of the demon possessed child (Mt. 17:18-20)
- Christ often reproved the disciples for "little faith" ("O ye of little faith," Mt. 6:30; 8:26; 14:31; 16:8).

The prayer of faith is based on God's Word; it is believing God's Word (Ro. 10:17). It is taking God's Word to God for fulfillment.

The prayer of faith is believing God's Word with certainty (Heb. 11:1).

- It is believing in such a way that one's faith connects with God's sure Word and the faith itself becomes substance and evidence.
- The Greek word translated "substance" is *hupostasis*, and it is also translated "CONFIDENCE" (2 Co. 9:4; 11:17; Heb. 3:14). In Hebrews 11:1, Wycliffe translated it "SUBSTANCE." Tyndale translated it "SURE CONFIDENCE," which is a way of making the confidence aspect of faith emphatic, as the terms "sure" and "confidence" have the same meaning. Tyndale was saying that faith is confidence doubled. The Geneva translated it "GROUND." The King James translators returned to "substance," which is a literal and excellent translation. Strong says it is "a SETTING UNDER (support)." True faith is all of this: substance, ground, confidence, sure confidence. We know that the Word of God is sure and substantive, but it doesn't affect my life until I connect with it by faith. Faith is the substance that connects my life with God's Word. The substance of faith is what I stand on when I am surrounded with trouble and doubts arise and there is no light in the present darkness and my soul is cast down and fearful.

- The prayer of faith is believing that God wants me to pray and that God wants to answer my prayers and that my prayers change things.

The prayer of faith is believing in an Almighty God ("throne" Heb. 4:16)

- Coming to Bill Gate's desk, Caesar's throne

The prayer of faith requires knowing God's will.

- First, I test the matter by God's Word to make sure that it conforms to God's revealed will and is not contrary to Scripture.
- Beyond that, the way that I know God's will is to pray for wisdom about a matter (Jas. 1:5) and wait on God ("wait on the Lord" Ps. 27:14; 37:34)
- Looking for good understanding.
- Looking for growing peace ("God is not the author of confusion, but of peace," 1 Co. 14:33; "let the peace of God rule in your hearts," Col. 3:15).

The prayer of faith requires that I understand that God is aggressively looking to show Himself strong in behalf of those who trust Him ("the eyes of the Lord," 2 Ch. 16:9).

The prayer of faith is believing God's Word regardless of feelings.

- The devil will try to use feelings to lead you astray from God's will or to turn you aside from God's will.

We have seen great things done by believing prayer.

- beginning of Way of Life (Bobby Meadows, Brooksville Printing)
- Seeking new door for Way of Life (around the world with no money)
- deputation 1988 - wiring system burned up
- starting O Timothy
- Saving O Timothy 1991
- Returning to Nepal in 2001
- When we started a full-time Bible college in 2013
- When we started planning to produce a K-12 video school for Nepal in mid-2015 toward a start date of January 2016

We have lived like this for all of our Christian lives. It is how Way of Life Literature was built. It's how we have planted churches in Nepal. It's how we raised our children. Believing prayer is sufficient for every need and every ministry.

Praying with Boldness (Heb. 4:16)

- To come boldly means not to come shyly, fearfully, apologetically, beggingly.
- We do not come boldly because we are good.
- We do not come boldly because we do religious works. Our good works cannot remove one sin before God.
- We do not come boldly because we *feel* right with God. Feelings come and go and are deceptive. The Bible never mentions feelings in connection with prayer. Compare Ps. 119:25, 28, 83; Jas. 5:13.
- We come boldly *because of the great price that was paid by Christ* (Heb. 10:19). The price was "precious," meaning exceedingly valuable (1 Pe. 1:19). When Christ died, He cried, "It is finished" (Joh. 19:30), and the veil was rent in the temple (Mt. 27:50-51), signifying the opening of the way into the presence of God through Christ's blood.

- We come boldly because of our new and eternal relationship with God in Christ. When I come to the throne of grace, we are coming to my loving Saviour; my faithful and compassionate High Priest (Heb. 4:14-15), who ever lives to make intercession for His people on the basis of His atonement (Heb. 7:25); my Father who has adopted me into His wonderful family (Ro. 8:15); my Elder Brother (Ro. 8:29; Heb. 2:11); my Bridegroom (Eph. 5:29-30). What boldness we can have at the throne of grace!
- The more the child of God grows in his knowledge of Christ and in the knowledge of his eternal, exalted position *in Christ*, the more confidence he can have in prayer.
- To come *without* boldness is to express unbelief and is to be looking at self more than at Christ. It is to doubt the sufficiency of His atonement. It is to doubt God's great promises in Christ. It is to doubt God's willingness to answer my prayers.
- Coming boldly is the opposite of begging. Begging has the idea of trying to manipulate God to do something, like a child begging his parent. Begging has the idea that I am not convinced God really wants to answer.

Praying with Fervency ("fervent," Jas. 5:16; "striving" Ro. 15:30)

Effectual prayer is fervent, passionate, earnest, zealous. It is engaging in spiritual warfare. It is not halfhearted, frivolous (Isa. 38:5; Col. 4:12).

Fervency happens when you engage in prayer with your whole mind and heart. You can't be half hearted, double minded.

Fervency happens when you pray for things that you deeply care for.

Praying with Persistence (Lu. 18:1)

Christ taught His people to ask, seek, and knock in prayer, and the verbs are in the continual tense: ask and keep on asking, seek and keep on seeking, knock and keep on knocking (Mt. 7:7).

The church in Jerusalem prayed "without ceasing" for Peter (Acts 12:5).

Persistence is required for many reasons. For one, God tests our faith (Jas. 1:3). Second, persistence is required because prayer is spiritual warfare. Daniel had to wait 21 days for an answer to prayer because of demonic opposition (Da. 10:12-14). Third, persistence is necessary because God is working in each of His children to grow them spiritually, and waiting on gifts is a necessary part of growth. Fourth, persistence is necessary because prayer zeal ebbs and flows.

Most great answers to prayer have required time and persistence.

Praying with Fasting (Mt. 17:21)

There is a study on fasting in *One Year Discipleship Course*.

Praying with Prayer Partners

Paul taught the importance of this by his frequent, earnest requests for prayer (Ro. 15:30; Eph. 6:19; Col. 4:3; 1 Th. 5:25; 2 Th. 3:1).

Praying a Lot

James 4:2 says, “ye have not, because ye ask not.” This is a very powerful revelation of God and His will. Think about it. God says, “Ye have not, because ye ask not.” This means that God *wants* His people to ask and He wants them to ask *a lot*.

Since we know that God is infinite, we think, “God knows my needs and He cares for me,” and we don’t pray for *everything* as we should.

The Practicality of Prayer

There are many ways that we can double down on prayer.

A private prayer closet

- Christ mentioned a prayer closet in Matthew 6:6. This simply refers to a quiet, private place where the individual meets with God.
- Effectual congregational prayer begins with effectual private prayer. God’s people must be prayer warriors in their private lives. They must engage in intercessory prayer for their families, their church leaders, their friends in Christ, their nation, the unsaved.

Prayer by husbands and wives

- The husband’s first prayer partner should be his own wife. We see husbands and wives praying together in 1 Corinthians 7:5.

Prayer at family devotions

- The family’s prayer should not be routine and ritual. The parents need to lead the children in how to pray and what to pray for. Praying for specific things and seeing God answer is a powerful witness to the children.

Serious prayer meetings

- In our church, we emphasize the importance of all of our people attending the prayer services. We have a half hour of testimonies, a half hour of preaching, and we then divide into groups of two or three or four and pray for at least a half hour.

Prayer chains

- A prayer chain is a pre-arranged plan to inform church members of special prayer requests. One person contacts another who contacts another, by pre-arranged plan.

24-hour prayer

- For this, members of the congregation sign up to pray at a certain time during a 24-hour period with the goal that someone will be praying at all hours.

Prayer before services

- Some churches have a prayer meeting before some or all of its services. I have always sensed special blessing in my preaching when ministering in churches that practice this.

Prayer before special meetings

- These used to be called “cottage prayer meetings” and they were common in some parts of America in the first part of the 20th century.

“In the day that my father’s church saw souls saved at almost every service, the service was preceded by 30 minutes of prayer. In our revivals back when I was a child, the prayer room was crowded 30-45 minutes before the opening of the service. Shut-ins were contacted so that they could join our efforts from their beds. Everything about those early meetings was bathed in prayer, and the results showed it. Revival is God’s gift in answer to our prayers. It is not given without conditions” (Evangelist Phil Shuler, “The Importance of Prayer in Evangelism”).

“I was saved just weeks when my pastor Jim Phillips mentioned having cottage prayer meetings. I wanted to have one. I had a large den in my house so he told me to invite some folks to come to my house on Friday night and he would come to my house and lead the meeting. ... Many there beside me were moved so powerfully that we met almost every Friday night for over three years. Oh if I only had space to tell you of the hundreds of answers to prayers. The growth In the Lord of those that attended” (Roy Harris, “Cottage Prayer Meetings”).

“Many times I have been grieved and disturbed of soul as I have watched folks labor so intensely in all manner of preparation for some spiritual event, but little or no prayer effort was expended at all. I have found that those churches that tarry long at prayer in preparation for their revival meetings have power on the meetings that is unusual and supernatural. I believe that the church should be called to prayer and fasting months before the meetings are to begin. Whether it be a revival meeting, a Bible conference, a missions conference or an evangelistic crusade, prayer must be the foundation for those endeavors. Prayer for these special events should be encouraged in each Sunday school class, in the youth department, the junior church, ladies Bible study groups, men's prayer breakfasts and prayer groups, and certainly on Wednesday evening at prayer meeting. As the time is drawing close for the revival endeavor, ‘cottage prayer meetings’ would be a good idea. Perhaps four or five families in the church could open their homes to folks to come and pray at a given time. If this is a well-led effort, it can be a blessing to all. This prayer thrust could take place perhaps one evening a week in the last two or three weeks before the revival meetings begin. ... Once the revival meeting begins, the men of the church ought to gather together with the pastor and the evangelist for prayer each night at least an hour before the beginning of the services” (Paul Mershon, “No Prayer, No Power”).

Pelham Baptist Church in South Carolina, was pastored by Harold B. Sightler from 1942 until 1952. Consider the following testimony about the power of prayer for revival and evangelism: “In 1946 only three people were baptized at Pelham, and so in early 1947 a week of prayer meetings were held at night at the church, prayer only, for revival and salvation of souls, with no preaching or singing. People began to get saved, and the church grew. The prayer meetings continued, and by 1949 were being held on Sunday nights after church in a pasture. These often drew a hundred people and sometimes lasted until one o'clock in the morning. A rock altar was built around a tree. Each represented a person being prayed for by name” (James Sightler, “Observations on Dr. Harold B. Sightler’s Early Ministry and the Heritage of Tabernacle Baptist Church,” <http://tabernacleministries.org/Church/history.php4>).

A CHURCH THAT IS STRONGER ABOUT SALVATION

Salvation is the fundamental of fundamentals. Disciples can be made only of born again saints. N.T. churches can only be built of born again saints. A “nominal”

Independent Baptists Prior to the 1970s

Prior to the 1970s, Independent Baptist churches were spiritually stronger, and one reason was that they were more careful about salvation. Consider some prominent examples:

J. Frank Norris, 1930s and 1940s -

- repentance is **“turning to God with unfeigned contrition, confession, and supplication for mercy”** and that the **“proper evidence” of the new birth “appears in the holy fruits of repentance and faith and newness of life.”**

- Norris preached an entire week on the subject of hell before he give an invitation, and more than a hundred and fifty were saved. HE BELIEVED IN PLOWING THE GROUND OF SINNER’S HEARTS WITH THE LAW OF GOD TO PREPARE THE SOUL FOR GENUINE CONVICTION AND REPENTANCE.

John R. Rice, 1940 - “To repent literally means **to have a change of mind or spirit toward God and toward sin. It means to turn from your sins**, earnestly, with all your heart, and trust in Jesus Christ to save you. You can see, then, how the man who believes in Christ repents and the man who repents believes in Christ. The jailer repented when he turned from sin to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ” (John R. Rice, *What Must I Do to Be Saved?* 1940).

Harold Sightler, 1963 - “Recognizing his guilt, there is a TURNING FROM SIN. There is a turning to God. The actual word ‘repentance’ means a turning completely around: a change of course; a change of mind. ... TO THINK OF REPENTANCE THAT DOES NOT CAUSE THE SINNER TO TURN GLADLY FROM HIS SINS IS IMPOSSIBLE. ... I know that we have a shallow religious movement in our times that will allow men to profess faith in Christ and at the same time continue to live in the world. Such a shallow religious faith is not real. These are mere professors and have no part with God in salvation” (*Chastening and Repentance*, 1963).

B.R. Lakin, 1964 - “Repentance toward God -- that’s TURNING AWAY FROM ALL YOUR SIN and everything you know to be wrong, and TURNING RIGHT ABOUT FACE, then trusting Jesus Christ as your complete Redeemer” (*Prepare to Meet Thy God*, 1964).

Lester Roloff, 1965 - “Repentance is a godly sorrow for sin. Repentance is a forsaking of sin. **Real repentance is putting your trust in Jesus Christ so you will not live like that anymore.** Repentance is permanent. It is a lifelong and an eternity-long experience. You will never love the devil again once you repent. You will never flirt with the devil as the habit of your life again once you get saved. You will never be happy living in sin; it will never satisfy; and the husks of the world will never fill your longing and hungering in your soul. Repentance is something a lot bigger than a lot of people think. It is absolutely essential if you go to heaven” (*Repent or Perish*, 1965).

The Independent Baptist church I joined in 1973 had biblical soul winning and looked for fruit and had a regenerate membership. It wasn't a mixed multitude. It was a church of disciples.

Independent Baptists after the 1970s

Soul winning changed in the 1970s. A new program was introduced and spread rapidly. I witnessed this program at Highland Park Baptist Church as a student at Tennessee Temple from 1974-1977. I call it "Quick Prayerism."

1. Quick Prayerism emphasizes how to get an individual to pray a sinner's prayer and does not look for evidence. It produces a vast numbers of empty professions.

- *How to Win Them to Christ and Get Them Down the Aisle* and *Let's Go Soul Winning* by Jack Hyles were used in the evangelism course at Temple.

- Highland Park baptized 1,000 people a year and reported thousands more "decisions."

- Hyles' Spanish department reported 35,000 professions from 1977-1987, but the average attendance was never more than 1,400 (<http://www.firesofevangelism.org/Origin.html>).

- Longview Baptist Temple in Longview, Texas, claims that more than one million people were won to Christ in 25 years, which is an average of 40,000 a year (www.lbtministries.com/Pastor/Meet_Our_Pastor.htm). Yet on an average Wednesday evening service, you will find only a few hundred people in attendance.

- County Fair Ministry: When we were given the "decision" cards to follow up a county fair ministry in Oklahoma in the late 1990s, of the hundreds of professions that were recorded we could not find *even one* person who gave any evidence of salvation or was even interested in attending church.

2. The biblical concept of plowing the soil properly to prepare it for salvation, sowing the seed, and patiently waiting for the fruit that comes only by God's Spirit was discarded for a quick salesmanship program.

The Carl Hatch Squeeze

I don't ask anybody if they want to be saved. If you want a positive answer you must ask a positive question. If you want a no answer ask a no question. If you want a yes answer ask a yes question. Soul winning is positive. And in soul winning you use a lot of psychology.

For instance, if you are lost and I say, "Mr. Smith, let me ask you a question. You don't want to go to hell, do you?"

He will answer, No.

I say, "Wonderful, you want to go to heaven, don't you?" He will say yes. I will reply, "Sure you do. Sure you do. I thank God for a man that doesn't want to go to hell."

Did you get that? I am reinforcing the fact that he wants to go to heaven. I'm keep everything positive.

I don't say, "Can I show this to you?" or "Do you mind if I read the Bible to you?" That's negative and you will probably get a negative answer. I just say, "I'm so glad you don't want to go to hell and I will just take a minute here to show you some verses. I don't have long and I know you

don't, either. There's three things that you need to know. First, Jesus died for you. Isn't that wonderful? Two, Jesus loves you. Isn't that wonderful? Three, Jesus wants you to go to heaven. Isn't that wonderful? And I'm so glad that you want to."

See, I am being positive.

He may say he has a lot of questions, but unsaved people don't have questions. Don't get on unsaved people's questions. Tell them that you will answer their questions later, but first you want to read a few verses of Scripture. Unsaved people don't have questions. If you get them saved, that answers all of them.

Let me tell you how to deal with someone who has a dumb spirit who bucks getting saved. You share the gospel and get them to the point of praying the sinner's prayer, but they stop. How do you get that type of person saved? Now, this will work in most cases. If he is a man, put your hand on his shoulder and say, "Mr. Jones, I want to have prayer for you. I'm thrilled you want to go to heaven. God has been good to you. Bow your head with me. Then I pray, "Lord, I'm so thankful for this man that doesn't want to burn in hell. I'm so thrilled he wants to go to heaven and not take his kids to hell. I thank you for this man. And I pray you will help him to see that need." While our heads are still bowed, I say, "Mr. Jones, if you want heaven as your home and Christ as your Saviour, pray this prayer. Lord Jesus." And if he doesn't repeat that and tries not to pray, I squeeze his shoulder. I use this technique. If I am dealing with the president of the bank, I take his hand and when it comes time for him to pray, I squeeze his hand. We've titled that the Carl Hatch squeeze. It works. If I am dealing with a woman, I ask her to put her hand on the Bible, and when it comes time to pray I just tap her hand gently. It works; it works. (This is from a Carl Hatch soul winning seminar at Texas Baptist University. Hatch was called the world's greatest soul winner by *Sword of the Lord* editor Curtis Hutson and by Jack Hyles.)

This is psychological manipulation, and it was invented by Jack Hyles. Leading questions were always positive, such as, "You want to go to heaven when you die, don't you?" Or when the soul winner mentioned hell, he was taught to say, "Of course you believe in Hell." Hyles adds, "If you say, 'Of course you believe in Hell,' he will hate to say he doesn't" (*Let's Go Soul Winning*, published by Sword of the Lord).

3. There was a frenzy for bigness.

The motivation for the change in the definition of repentance and in the doctrine of eternal security was the frenzy for numbers and bigness. The *Sword of the Lord* promoted the "biggest" and "the fastest growing" concept; introduction of preachers at Highland Park; Elmer Towns *America's Ten Largest Sunday Schools*

4. Repentance was redefined to justify this program

There was a change in philosophy about repentance. Instead of turning to God from sin and false religion, it became *turning from unbelief to belief*. Instead of repentance as something that produces evidence (Acts 26:20), it was something that might not be seen. We have seen that former Ind. Baptist preachers taught a clear doctrine of repentance, but this was changed.

- Curtis Hutson "The problem and confusion is not preaching repentance but attaching the wrong definition to the word. For instance, to say that repentance means to turn from sin, or to say that repentance is a change of mind that leads to a change of action, is to give a wrong

definition to the word” (*Repentance: What Does the Bible Teach?* Sword of the Lord, 1986, p. 16).

- Jack Hyles “So, yes, there is a repentance from unbelief in order to believe. ... With your will you believe and rely upon Christ to save you. In order to believe, you have to repent of unbelief. That which makes a man lost must be corrected” (*Enemies of Soulwinning*, 1993).

5. The emphasis of soul winning turned from life changing repentance to “going to heaven when you die.”

This is the theme of the Jack Hyles’ method of soul winning. “Let me ask you this, Mr. Doe: ‘Do you know that if you died today, you would go to Heaven?’ Did you ever think you would like to know that if you died you would go to Heaven? Do you feel that if I could show you in the Bible exactly how you could know that if you died you would go to Heaven, and if you could see it and understand it, would you be willing to do it?” (*Let’s Go Soul Winning*, Sword of the Lord Publishers, 1962).

Not once in the book of Acts do we find a preacher saying, “Do you want to go to heaven when you die? If so, you need to do this...”

6. The doctrine of eternal security was corrupted.

In Scripture, the doctrine of eternal security is never divorced from a life-changing salvation experience. See John 10:27-30; Ro. 8:1; 1 Co. 15:1-2; Col. 1:21-23; 2 Ti. 2:19; Heb. 6:8-11; 10:38-39; 1 John 3:1-3.

But in the 1970s, eternal security was divorced from a change of life. The typical soul winning program aimed to lead someone in a sinner’s prayer and then give him “assurance of salvation” immediately, even if there was no evidence that the person was even sincere in the prayer, even if the person would not even invite the soul winner into his house.

Shallow, unscriptural soul winning and neglect of repentance have produced incredibly weak churches; it has produced churches that are mixed multitudes instead of churches of disciples.

Biblical Evangelism

The evangelist’s part

The sinner’s part

God’s part

The evangelists’ part

- to look for the sinner’s part and God’s part

The Evangelist’s Part

In a nutshell, the evangelist’s job is to preach repentance toward God and faith toward Christ (Acts 20:21)

Preach Repentance toward God (Acts 20:21)

The Necessity of Repentance

- "A believe that does not start at repentance is a vain belief."
- John Baptist preached it ("saying, Repent ye," Mt. 3:1-2), Christ preached it ("Jesus began to preach, and to say, Repent," (Mt. 4:17; "except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish," Lu. 13:3, 5); Christ came to call sinners to repentance (Mt. 9:13); Peter preached it (Acts 2:38; 3:19); Paul preached it ("God now commandeth all men everywhere to repent," Ac. 17:30)
- Repentance is part of Christ's Great Commission ("that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations," Lu. 24:47)
- Repentance is God's will for every sinner ("not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance," 2 Pe. 3:9)
- Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum perished because they did not repent (Mt. 11:20)
- When Cornelius was saved, the believers glorified God because He had "to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life" (Ac. 11:18)

The Meaning of Repentance

- Biblical repentance is a change of mind that results in a change of life. This is the definition I learned from Bruce Lackey in the 1970s and it is absolutely correct.
- But let's make repentance more practical under the following definitions:
 - (1) Repentance is **humbling** oneself before God (meek, contrite Ps. 34:18; 51:17; 57:15; 66:2; Isa. 61:1)
 - (2) Repentance is **turning** to God (Thessalonians 1 Th. 1:9); "Repentance is turning right about--in other words, as a soldier would call it, 'right about face.' As someone has said, man is born with his back to God. When he truly repents he turns right around and faces God" (D.L. Moody).
 - (3) Repentance is **surrendering** to God's authority; God is God, God is good, God is righteous, God is right - not me; it is to acknowledge that I have sinned against God and been an idolater
 - (4) Repentance is **receiving the convicting work of the Holy Spirit** (Joh. 16:8); it is the Spirit who convicts and who must be convinced of my repentance
- "Repentance is man's response to God's call; it is the 'I will' of the soul" (Gipsy Smith)

Four pre-eminent biblical examples of repentance

- The Prodigal Son (Lu. 15:11-24)
- The woman at the well (John 4:4-42)
- Zacchaeus (Lu. 19:1-10)
- The idolaters at Thessalonica (1:9-10)

Preach Faith toward Jesus Christ (Acts 20:21)

Faith toward Jesus Christ is **to believe the gospel** (Ro. 1:16; 1 Co. 15:1-4)

- You don't have to be a theologian to be saved, but you must know the gospel
- Many Christians we meet don't know the gospel (taxi driver in S. Africa; people in Nepal; ask people this as a way to find out where they are spiritually); it is possible for a person to be saved without a clear understanding of the gospel, but this is rare and it is a problem that should be corrected immediately and zealously.
- Believing the gospel means that I know who Christ is; I must know that He is the One promised in Scripture; the theme of Scripture; What is Scripture? He is the virgin born Son of God; He is the sinless Saviour
- Believing the gospel means I agree that I am the sinner that the Bible says I am; it is wholeheartedly admitting my lostness; I am not good; there is no righteousness that I have that is acceptable to God (Isa. 64:6)

- Believing the gospel means that I believe that Jesus died for my sins; this means that understand that I deserve eternal judgment and that judgment fell upon Christ; this means that I understand that salvation is an exchange (2 Co. 5:21); this means I must believe that Christ was the sinless Son of God, virgin born
- Believing the gospel means that I believe that Jesus rose from the dead the third day; evidence is eyewitnesses and changed lives (Paul)
- I must believe with the whole heart (Acts 8:36-37; John 6:67-69); not 99%; believing with the heart and not merely the head or merely intellectually

Miscellaneous Important Lessons

There is no one scriptural approach; no one plan; no one program; every major encounter was different (Christ and Nicodemus, Christ and woman at well, Christ and Zacchaeus, Christ and rich young ruler, Peter on Pentecost, Peter with Cornelius, Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch, Paul and the Philippian jailer, Paul and Lydia).

We are living at the end of the church age, not the beginning (what did not exist 2,000 years ago: 1000 types of Christianity, apostasy (RCC and Orthodoxy and Protestantism and Pentecostalism and Cults), Christian nations, lukewarmness (then it was one, not it is 99 out of 100), evolution, atheism, cheap evangelism (Chattanooga, Nepal)

The evangelist's job is to preach repentance and faith and to keep preaching it until the person rejects or is saved.

The evangelist's job is to discern each individual's condition and need and to focus on him as an individual.

The evangelist's job is be patient and wait for God to work the work of repentance and faith; salvation is of God; Christ likened the Spirit's work in the new birth to the wind (John 3:7-8); "I know not how the Spirit moves convincing men of sin; revealing Jesus through his word, creating faith in him" (D.W. Whittle, "I Know Whom I Have Believed," 1883, stanza 3).

If an individual is not willing to listen and try to understand, he cannot be saved; no such example in Scripture; until you find such people and pray such people in, you will have nothing but empty professions (Mt. 13:19).

The evangelist's job is *never* to give assurance; that is God's job (Ro. 8:15-16).

Looking for Biblical Evidence

We must look for precisely the evidence that is described in Scripture, not more and not less.

This is the most fundamental, essential thing that churches must do to be stronger.

All of these evidences are interconnected; salvation is a supernatural conversion that changes the *whole* life.

Salvation is not passing a written test; it is not merely answering questions rightly. It is a new spiritual life.

We must have spiritual wisdom to discern spiritual life; not everyone has very good discernment in this matter. In discerning salvation, we believe there is safety in numbers and in unanimity and a mixture of men and women. "For by wise counsel thou shalt make thy war: and in multitude of counsellors *there is safety*" (Pr. 24:6).

Biblical evidence of salvation is *not*

- church attendance (millions of unsaved people attend church services: Catholic, Orthodox, Charismatics, Cults)
- Bible reading (some read Bible out of curiosity; as intellectual exercise, as religious duty, for blessing and good luck)
- Christian service (Matthew 7:21-23)

BIBLICAL EVIDENCES OF SALVATION

Rejection of false religion (1 Th. 1:9)

- Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, New Age, Atheism, Roman Catholicism, every works religion, witchcraft, every demonic religion
- A complete, unequivocal renunciation

Rejection of all self-righteousness

- The evidence is full, unequivocal acknowledgement of one's lost condition.
- we see this in the example of the publican in Luke 18:13
- C.H. Spurgeon gave the example of Jack the Huckster, a wicked man who got saved and thereafter had the testimony, "I'm a poor sinner and nothing at all, but Jesus Christ is my all in all."

"For the last few years I have been a good deal more anxious for a deep and true work in professing converts than I have for great numbers. If a man professes to be converted without realizing the heinousness of his sins, he is likely to be one of those stony ground hearers who don't amount to anything. ... I believe we are making a woeful mistake in taking so many people into the Church who have never been truly convicted of sin. William Dawson once told this story to illustrate how humble the soul must be before it can find peace. He said that at a revival meeting, a little lad who was used to Methodist ways, went home to his mother and said, 'Mother, John So-and-so is under conviction and seeking for peace, but he will not find it tonight, mother.' 'Why, William?' she said. 'Because he is only down on one knee, mother, and he will never get peace until he is down on both knees.' Until conviction of sin brings us down on both knees, until we are completely humbled, until we have no hope in ourselves left, we cannot find the Savior" (D.L. Moody, *Results of True Repentance*).

Believing in Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour with the whole heart (Acts 8:37; Joh. 6:66-69)

A Personal relationship with the Lord (John 17:3)

- Salvation is not a reformation, turning over a new leaf, a new religion. It is not doing something; it is to know the Lord personally, to walk and talk with Him as Lord and Saviour, Father and Friend.
- God gives the witness of the Spirit to His children (Ro. 8:14-16; Gal. 4:6)

Love for God's Word (John 8:47)

- A person's attitude toward the Bible is one of the clearest evidences of his spiritual condition. Jesus said that His sheep hear His voice and follow Him (Jn. 10:26-30).

Understanding and believing the Gospel (1 Co. 15:3-8)

- Christ is the Son of God, eternal, Creator, virgin born, sinless
- Christ died according to the Scriptures (foretold in Bible prophecy)
- Christ died for our sins (this means that I know that I am the sinner God says I am, Ro. 3:10-23; righteousness filthy rags Isa. 64:6; this means that I believe that Christ paid the full punishment for my sins)
- Christ rose from the dead and is alive (eyewitness evidence)
- If someone is saved, he will continue in the gospel (1 Co. 15:1-2).

Public confession of Christ (Ro. 10:8-10)

Renunciation of the world (1 Jn. 2:15-17; Jam. 4:4)

- Biblical salvation brings a change in attitude toward the world; enemy instead of friend. *The Sword and the Trowel* of 1865 said the elders of Metropolitan Tabernacle looked for “a desire to come out of the world.” “[A] theme which shines out distinctly in the vast majority of records is the forsaking of worldliness at conversion. All is changed for the convert. Worldly pleasures are given up and the life devoted to Christ and his people from that time on. Pursuits such as the penny theater, public houses, music parties, the use of popular songs, and gambling are spoken of repeatedly as holding no pleasure for the new believer. The markedly different life of believers is often mentioned as instrumental in bringing others to enquire into Christian things. The change was not limited to church attendance, but extended to all areas of life” (*Wonders of Grace: Original Testimonies of Converts During Spurgeon’s Early Years*, 2016).

A change in life and thinking (John 3:3; Mt. 18:3; 2 Co. 5:17)

- Biblical salvation is a conversion experience that changes the life. It is life from the dead; it is the blind seeing and the deaf hearing. Every salvation recorded in the New Testament involves a life-changing conversion experience (e.g., the woman at the well, Zacchaeus, the Jews on day of Pentecost, the Ethiopian eunuch, Lydia, the Philippian jailer).
- The Great Awakenings in America focused on salvation with evidence. “[T]he most important practical idea which then received increased prominence and power ... was the idea of the ‘new birth’ ... [This is] the doctrine, that in order to be saved, a man must undergo a change in his principles of moral action, **which will be either accompanied or succeeded by exercises of which he is conscious, and can give an account; so that those who have been thus changed, may ordinarily be distinguished from those who have not**; from which it follows that all who exhibit no evidence of such a change, ought to be considered and treated as unregenerate, and on the road to perdition, and therefore not admitted to the communion of the churches. ... The history of the ‘Great Awakening’ is the history of this idea, making its way through some communities where it had fallen into comparative neglect, and through others where it was nearly or quite unknown; overturning theories and habits and forms of organization inconsistent with it, where it could prevail, and repelled by them, where it could not...” (Joseph Tracy, *The Great Awakening*).
- Biblical salvation brings a change in attitude toward God (He is LORD! He owns me!)
- Biblical salvation brings a change in attitude toward the Bible (John 14:23-24).
- Biblical salvation brings a change in attitude toward authority.

Interest in souls

- A saved person will want to tell others about Christ. Andrew immediately told his brother Peter about Jesus (Joh. 1:40-42), and Philip told Nathanael (Joh. 1:45).

- The Metropolitan Tabernacle in Spurgeon's day looked for "a deep interest in the unconverted."

Divine chastisement (Heb. 12:6-8)

- A child of God can and does sin; we don't look for sinless perfection; but there is an indwelling Disciplinarian who chastens the saved person.
- The saved person will have a new sensitivity to sin and conviction about sin.

What about the carnal Christian? 1 Corinthians 3:1-3

- The carnal Christian is a born again saint who has fleshly elements in his life.
- it is *not* a person who merely professes Christ with the mouth and does not show evidence in his life.
- Corinthian believers were carnal but *they were zealous Christians*. They gave clear evidence of salvation (1 Co. 6:9-11). They were zealous for spiritual things (1 Co. 14:12), and they abounded in "faith, utterance, knowledge, diligence, and love" (2 Co. 8:7).

What about Lot?

- Lot was a carnal believer who made unwise decisions that resulted in sorrow and destruction, but Lot was "vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked" (2 Pe. 2:7), and unlike his wife and married children, he obeyed the angel and fled Sodom. Lot is not an example of a worldly teenager in a church that professes Christ but secretly loves the filthy conversation of the wicked.

Not 100% Lord

- I have known of a few churches that require a "lordship" conversion, meaning that in practice they look for the individual to make "Jesus completely Lord." If there are areas of holdout in that individual's life and if there is still a struggle with sin, doubting, carnality, they tend to believe that the individual is unsaved.
- The mark of such churches is that an inordinate number of people "get saved" when no one around them doubted their salvation previously.
- Another mark is that they can't tell people exactly what to do to be saved; They tell people to wait on the work of God. We never see that in Scripture. There is something you can do *right now* to be saved.
- The fruit of this type of thing is bad. It causes confusion. It causes the individual to look at himself too much rather than keeping his eyes on Christ. It can result in shipwreck.

Not a long process of grieving and testing

- Salvation can take a long time but not necessarily
- John Asquith made many professions. "Late in 1981 Bill Randall gave the church a list of verses that he called 'Birth by the Word.' In that list, he had catalogued all of the verses whereby God claims that it is by receiving the word of God that people are saved. .. He challenged us to review that list daily until such time we knew whether or not we were in Christ. On Jan. 12th, 1982, I sat in my home and shut myself away from my wife and seriously went over that list. I could find no assurance. I bowed my head and keeping in mind everything I knew about sorrow for sin and the grace of God I solemnly asked Jesus to save me a repentant sinner. ... I came out of the little room that I was in and told my wife of just six weeks that I had just gotten saved. I called my pastor and told him. There was just one person who was not satisfied with my repentance and that was the Holy Ghost. ..., I began to go through them. Once again, my assurance collapsed. I determined that I would not stop until I had assurance. I believed that God was a rewarder of them that diligently seek him and that

the reward was God himself and that he would give me assurance. Carefully I looked at each verse. Carefully I thought about whether that verse said I was saved or lost. In an hour or so I had gotten lost a few times and made a few professions. There were 123 verses in that list and they were not to be gone through quickly. On one particular occasion, I got all the way through the list only to have the very last verse raise an inkling of doubt. I screamed with frustration” (Asquith, pp. 172, 173)

The sad example of David Brainerd

Consider the famous missionary to the North American Indians, David Brainerd. Many times he fasted and begged Jesus Christ for mercy. Following are excerpts from his diary:

- April 1738 “My manner of life was now exceeding regular, and full of religion, such as it was; for I read my Bible more than twice through in less than a year, spent much time every day in prayer and other secret duties, and gave great attention to the word preached, and endeavoured to my utmost to retain it. ... In short, I had a very good outside, and rested entirely on my duties, though not sensible of it. ... Thus I proceeded a considerable length on a self-righteous foundation”

- Beginning of winter 1738 “It pleased God, on one sabbath day morning, as I was walking out for some secret duties, to give me on a sudden such a sense of my danger, and the wrath of God, that I stood amazed, and my former good frames, that I pleased myself with, all presently vanished. From the view I had of my sin and vileness, I was much distressed all that day, fearing the vengeance of God would soon overtake me. ... thus I lived from day to day, being frequently in great distress: sometimes there appeared mountains before me to obstruct my hopes of mercy; and the work of conversion appeared so great, that I thought I should never be the subject of it. ... And though hundreds of times, I renounced all pretense of any worth in my duties, as I thought, even while performing them, and often confessed to God that I deserved nothing, for the very best of them, but eternal condemnation, yet still I had a secret hope of recommending myself to God by my religious duties.”

- February 1739 “I set apart a day for secret fasting and prayer, and spent the day in almost incessant cries to God for mercy, that he would open my eyes to see the evil of sin, and the way of life by Jesus Christ. And God was pleased that day to make considerable discoveries of my heart to me. But still I trusted in all the duties I performed ...

- “I daily longed for greater conviction of sin, supposing that I must see more of my dreadful state in order to a remedy ... I constantly strove after whatever qualifications I imagined others obtained before the reception of Christ, in order to recommend me to his favour.”

- “The many disappointments, great distresses, and perplexity I met with, put me into a most horrible frame of contesting with the Almighty; with an inward vehemence and virulence finding fault with his ways of dealing with mankind. I found great fault with the imputation of Adam’s sin to his posterity; and my wicked heart often wished for some other way of salvation, than by Jesus Christ.”

- “Being sensible of the necessity of a deep humiliation in order to a saving close with Christ, I used to set myself to work in my own heart those convictions that were requisite in such an humiliation, as a conviction that God would be just, if he cast me off for ever; that if ever God should bestow mercy on me, it would be mere grace, though I should be in distress many years first, and be never so much engaged in duty; that God was not in the least obliged to pity me the more for all past duties, cries, and tears, etc. I strove to my utmost to bring myself to a firm belief of these things and a hearty assent to them, and hoped that now I was brought off from myself, truly humbled, and that I bowed to the divine sovereignty. I was wont to tell God in my prayers, that now I have those very dispositions of soul that he required, and on which he showed mercy to others, and thereupon to beg and plead for mercy to me. But when

I found no relief, and was still oppressed with guilt, and fears of wrath, my soul was in tumult, and my heart rose against God, as sealing hardly with me.”

- “Thus, scores of times, I vainly imagined myself humbled and prepare for saving mercy. And while I was in this distressed, bewildered, and tumultuous state of mind, the corruption of my heart was especially irritated with the following things: 1. The strictness of the divine law. For I found it was impossible for me, after my utmost pains, to answer its demands. I often made new resolutions, and as often broken them. ... 2. Another thing was, that faith alone was the condition of salvation; that God would not come down to lower terms, and that he would not promise life and salvation upon my sincere and hearty prayers and endeavours. ... 3 Another thing was, that I could not find out what faith was; or what it was to believe, and come to Christ. I read the calls of Christ to the weary and heavy laden; but could find no way that he directed them to come in. I thought I would gladly come, if I knew how, though the path of duty were never so difficult. I read Mr. Stoddard’s Guide to Christ ... he did not tell me any thing I could do that would bring me to Christ, but left me as it were with a great gulf between, without any direction to get through. ... 4 Another thing to which I found a great inward opposition, was the sovereignty of God. I could not bear that it should be wholly at God’s pleasure to save or damn me, just as he would. ... I was the more afraid of God, and driven further from any hopes of reconciliation with him.”

- “After a considerable time spent in such like exercises and distresses, one morning, while I was walking in a solitary place, as usual, I at once saw that all my contrivances and projects to effect or procure deliverance and salvation for myself, were utterly in vain; I was brought quite to a stand, as finding myself totally lost. I had thought many times before, that the difficulties in my way were very great; but now I saw, in another and very different light, that it was for ever impossible for me to do any thing towards helping or delivering myself.”

- “I continued, as I remember, in this state of mind, from Friday morning till the sabbath evening, following (July 12, 1739), ... for near half an hour, then, as I was walking in a dark thick grove, unspeakable glory seemed to open to the view and apprehension of my soul. ... it was a new inward apprehension or view that I had of God, such as I never had before. .. I stood still, wondered, and admired! ... My soul rejoiced with joy unspeakable, to see such a God, such a glorious Divine Being; and I was inwardly pleased and satisfied that he should be God over all for ever and ever. ... Thus God, I trust, brought me to a hearty disposition to exalt him, and set him on the throne, and principally and ultimately to aim at his honour and glory, as King of the universe. ... I felt myself in a new world, and everything about me appeared with a different aspect from what it was wont to do. At this time, the way of salvation opened to me with such infinite wisdom, suitableness, and excellency, that I wondered I should ever think of any other way of salvation.”

Repentance is not complicated

- Some have made repentance complicated. But God commands everyone to do it (Acts 17:31)

- Repentance is a surrender to God; it is turning to God (1 Th. 1:9); Prodigal Son - “I have sinned against heaven and before thee” (Lk. 15:18).

Salvation is not difficult

- It is not a “thing” you do; it is Person you receive. It is coming to Christ as a needy sinner (Mt. 11:28). It is receiving Christ like opening the door to Him (Rev. 3:20)

The need for patience

- I can’t emphasize this enough. Don’t be hasty! Be as sure as you be.

The need for spiritual discernment

- Keen spiritual discernment is required when dealing with people about salvation. This is the discernment that is essential for a pastor.
- God has promised wisdom to those who seek it (Pr. 3:5-6; James 1:5).
- Unanimity is a helpful protection in discerning salvation.

Dealing with Children

The church must be very careful when dealing with children and youth; they can be saved (Mt. 19:14, Samuel 1 Sam. 3), but they are easily manipulated; every child growing up in a Bible-believing church “believes in Jesus,” but so do the devils (Jam. 2:19). Salvation is not a mere belief in Jesus; it is a supernatural experience that sets an individual on an entirely different course in life.

- Be very patient and don’t put any pressure on them
 - Continually and patiently teach them the gospel.
 - Let them initiate this and even then be very careful and patient; John Shrader’s parents telling him, “That’s good; let’s talk about it tomorrow.”
 - Look for evidence (especially a change in attitude toward authority, a change in relationship with the Bible, knowledge of God as Abba Father, a change in attitude toward the world.
 - Don’t be in a hurry to pronounce them saved and baptize them (if you have a Ethiopian eunuch conversion, baptize him!); it can’t hurt to be patient and make sure, but it can hurt to be impatient (e.g., false hopes, doubts, confusion)
 - Let God give them assurance (Ro. 8:15-16).
- We deal with child evangelism in *The Mobile Phone and the Christian Home and Church* available as a free ebook

A CHURCH THAT IS STRONGER ABOUT MEMBERSHIP

A regenerate church membership is an ancient Baptist principle based on the Bible's teaching, and it was practiced by Baptist churches in America until the early 20th century.

At the Baptist World Conference in 1905, J.D. Freeman said, "The principle of regenerate Church membership more than anything else, marks our distinctiveness in the world today. ... both logic and experience teach its importance as a safeguard to the Church from intrusion of unregenerate life" ("Baptists and a Regenerate Church Membership," *Review and Expositor*, Spring 1963).

The New Testament principle of a regenerate membership was destroyed in old times by the practice of infant baptism and the sacramental gospel (faith in Christ plus sacraments and good works).

Church of England:

"We yield thee hearty thanks, most merciful Father, that it hath pleased thee to regenerate this infant with thy Holy Spirit, to receive him for thine own child by adoption, and to incorporate him into thy holy church."

This practice destroyed the power of the church because it filled the church with unregenerate people.

Regenerate church membership is being corrupted today by shallow evangelism and hastiness and carelessness in receiving members.

Today, the unregenerate church member doesn't trust his infant baptism and confirmation; he trusts his "sinner's prayer."

The Southern Baptist Convention has been called "an unregenerate denomination" because in a typical SBC congregation only 30% of the members attend Sunday morning services and only 12% "participate in any further aspect of church life."

The same has been true of a large number of Independent Baptist churches of the past 50 years.

Caution about membership is part of New Testament church discipline.

James Crumpton divided church discipline into *constructive* church discipline, *corrective* church discipline, and *punitive* church discipline.

- Constructive church discipline involves things such as care in receiving members, the church's preaching/teaching ministry, and the "one another" ministry of edification (e.g., Ro. 15:14; Eph. 4:16, 32; 1 Th. 5:11; Heb. 10:25).

"A very important measure in constructive church discipline is that of exercising care in receiving members into the church. The devil could tuck his horns behind his ears, walk down the aisle of the average church, ask for membership, and be received without one dissenting vote. ... To bring the person seeking membership in one of the local churches of our Lord Jesus

Christ face to face with what church membership really means is for his good, the good of the church, and the glory of the Saviour. Many churches receive members, never telling them that they have a covenant. With too many of our day, church membership has degenerated into a trivial ceremony that has absolutely no place of value or lasting interest in their lives. Folk by the hundreds and thousands join the church yet never support it with their testimony, time, money, talents, presence, influence, labor, or prayers. Therefore, the purpose of constructive church discipline is to so change this sad state of affairs that being a church member will really have a vital meaning” (James Crumpton, *New Testament Church Discipline*).

Our Standards for Church Membership

Acts 2:41-42 gives the preeminent biblical example for church membership.

People with a shaky testimony of salvation and who are not faithful after the fashion of the members at the church of Jerusalem are not qualified to be church members.

Following are the things we look for in receiving members into our church:

1. A clear testimony of salvation and a changed life to back it up, whether joining by profession and baptism or from another church (Acts 2:41)

In a nutshell, we look for the following four things:

Repentance toward God (Acts 20:21)

- Brokenness because of sin against God
- 2 Co. 7:11
- clear, unequivocal renunciation of idolatry, false religion, false gospels, witchcraft

Faith in Christ (Acts 20:21)

- 100% confidence in the atonement of Christ and zero confidence in one's goodness, works, sacraments, or anything else
- believing in Christ with the whole heart (Acts 8:37); no doubts; sure (Peter's testimony Joh. 6:69)
- "The core of the testimony would need to show that the person was relying only on the blood of Christ for salvation. They would also be asked if they understood the need for the imputed righteousness of Christ" (Metropolitan Tabernacle)

Understanding the Gospel (1 Co. 15:3-4)

- You don't have to be a theologian to be saved, but you must know the gospel
- I must know what is "the Scriptures."
- I must know who is "Christ"? this means I must believe that Christ is the Creator, the sinless Son of God; virgin born (contrast SBC seminary chapel statue of Karl Barth; student said virgin birth not necessary)
- I must admit I am the sinner that the Bible says I am; it is the Holy Spirit who shows me my sin (John 16:8); I am not good; there is no righteousness that I have that is acceptable to God (Isa. 64:6); contrast man in California who prayed sinner's prayer but still believed his good works would get him to heaven
- I must believe that Jesus died for my sins; I deserve eternal judgment; that judgment fell 100% upon Christ; Christ is the Lamb of God; salvation is an exchange (2 Co. 5:21)

- I must believe that Jesus rose from the dead the third day; evidence is the eyewitnesses and changed lives (apostle Paul)
- I must believe that Jesus died and rose “according to the Scriptures.” Messianic prophecies

Conversion with a change of life as evidence

- Every salvation testimony in the New Testament consisted of a conversion with a change of life.
- Salvation is life from the dead; it is the blind receiving sight.
- Salvation is to know the Lord personally as Father (Ro. 8:15-16; Jer. 31:34).
- There will be a desire to continue in the apostles doctrine and fellowship and breaking of bread and prayers (Acts 2:42).
- There will be a change in attitude toward the world; pilgrim mindset; love of world not love of the Father (1 Jo. 2:15-17). This world is God’s enemy, and love of world is adultery (Jam. 4:4); *The Sword and the Trowel* of 1865 said the elders of Metropolitan Tabernacle looked for “a desire to come out of the world.” “[A] theme which shines out distinctly in the vast majority of records is the forsaking of worldliness at conversion. All is changed for the convert. Worldly pleasures are given up and the life devoted to Christ and his people from that time on. Pursuits such as the penny theater, public houses, music parties, the use of popular songs, and gambling are spoken of repeatedly as holding no pleasure for the new believer. The markedly different life of believers is often mentioned as instrumental in bringing others to enquire into Christian things. The change was not limited to church attendance, but extended to all areas of life” (*Wonders of Grace: Original Testimonies of Converts During Spurgeon’s Early Years*, 2016).
- There will be an interest in telling others about Jesus (Andrew and Peter, Philip and Nathanael, Joh. 1:40-42, 45); the Metropolitan Tabernacle in Spurgeon’s day looked for “a deep interest in the unconverted.”

Metropolitan Tabernacle in Charles Spurgeon’s day

- Charles Spurgeon began pastoring the Metropolitan Tabernacle of London, England, in 1854 at age 20, and was the senior pastor until his death in 1892. His superlative preaching drew massive crowds, and the church grew from “a handful” to a membership of over 5,300.
- If someone applied for baptism and membership, he was assigned an elder or deacon to counsel him; they looked for evidences of salvation; they were patient. They were not in a hurry to pronounce individuals saved and to baptize them. They wanted things to be clear. They wanted to have confidence in the individual’s profession and testimony. If they counseled someone and things were not clear, they tried to help the individual by assigning him or her to get further counsel, to read certain selections from the Bible or certain sermons, or to attend a certain Bible class.
- If the applicant was not quite clear on some things, the elders might give further questions to be answered, Bible passages to be read and prayed over. They might be given the *Baptist Confession of Faith* to study, or be directed to attend one of the Bible classes to help them further.
- Once satisfied, the interviewer would give a card for the individual to see Spurgeon. He spent several hours each Tuesday seeing such people and comparing notes with the elders and deacons

2. Scriptural baptism (Acts 2:41)

Scriptural baptism is baptism by immersion by a Scriptural church as a public testimony of one’s saving faith in Jesus Christ.

- must first be saved

- church must have a sound gospel (must believe in eternal security)

3. Faithfulness (“continued steadfastly” Acts 2:42)

- For a few years I prayed and asked the Lord how strict we should be and whether we had the authority to require faithfulness from every church member. Tradition taught me that we can’t require faithfulness (SBC and IB). I knew that we could require faithfulness of the workers, but what about all church members? The Lord replied with Acts 2:42.
- I have come to see that by not requiring faithfulness we are disobeying God’s Word; we are following human tradition rather than God’s Word; we are honoring man more than God; and we are despising Christ and His Church.
- Every serious institution in human society requires faithfulness (government, courts, businesses, even sports teams), but not the most important institution, which is the church of God.

Inactive Membership

The following is from our church covenant:

God requires that church members be faithful to the services, and that is what our church requires. The church’s job is to build up and protect the members (Eph. 4:11-16), but this is not possible if the members aren’t faithful. The church is a body and each member has an important part in the body (1 Co. 12:27), and it is impossible to carry on the Lord’s business unless the members are present. Therefore, members must faithfully attend the services, including the men’s meeting on Saturday, the mid-week prayer meetings, and the Bible conferences.

If an individual ceases to be faithful, the church leaders or those appointed by the leaders will meet with him and try to restore him. Each case will be dealt with individually, and the leaders will consider such things as the person’s health, age, distance from the meeting places, and family situation (for example, a young person with unbelieving parents or a wife with an unbelieving husband). Exceptions will be made for those who are truly unable to attend all of the services. The leaders will try to determine the state of the individual’s spiritual life and whether or not his heart is right in this matter. The process of dealing with those who aren’t completely faithful will take as long as the leaders deem necessary.

If the individual continues to be faithful without a proper excuse, he will be put on the inactive membership roll and cannot participate in the Lord’s Supper and business meetings. For another four months, the church leaders will continue to try to restore the individual to faithfulness. If that is unsuccessful, he or she will be removed from the membership.

To be restored to membership, the individual must confess his sin of unfaithfulness before the church and show true repentance. He must prove his faithfulness for some time before he is re-admitted to membership.

4. Agreement in doctrine and practice (1 Co. 1:10)

- Our church covenant is 35 pages long, and we require 100% agreement.
- The covenant is for teaching and for maintaining unity
- Non-members are welcome to attend and benefit from our church’s ministry, as long as they don’t cause trouble, but they cannot partake in the Lord’s Supper, participate in church business, or hold any ministry.
- We do our best to minister to these people and to bring them up to the place where they can be members.

5. Submission to authority (Heb. 13:17)

- God requires submission to authority, and so should the church.
 - We don't want to receive rebels into our church family, whether they are young or old. If we detect an element of stubbornness toward authority, we hold off on receiving that individual as a member.
 - We want to help rebels if possible, but we want to help them *before* membership. We don't believe that a rebel is a proper candidate for membership in a New Testament church. We see no such people in Acts 2:41-42.
- Again, this is why we want to get to know people before receiving them as members

Caution and Patience

1. Must be known to us. We don't baptize and receive strangers; we want to know the person's testimony.
2. Each candidate must attend a baptismal class.
3. Each candidate appears before the church leaders and their wives to give his testimony and to answer any questions we might have.
4. Before baptism, the individual stands before the church and gives his testimony to the entire congregation.

As a result, all of our members are faithful. The majority of the young people are separating from the world and seeking Christ's will for their lives.

A CHURCH THAT IS STRONGER ABOUT GOD'S STANDARDS

Two entire chapters are devoted to describing the high standards for church leaders (1 Ti. 3; Titus 1).

And the standards are high for every worker: "required ... that a man be found faithful" 1 Co. 4:2; "faithful men" 2 Ti. 2:2; "whom we have oftentimes proved diligent in many things" 2 Co. 8:22

Maintaining high biblical standards for leaders and workers is how you raise the spiritual climate of the church.

- The leaders and workers set the tone and give the example for the entire congregation.
- If a church compromises on this, it is already on a downward slide.
- It is better to err on being a little too strict.

This neglect of biblical standards for workers pulls down the spiritual atmosphere of the church.

Arguments against Standards

"We must reach the heart and not focus on externals."

- proper biblical standards *do* focus on the spiritual qualifications.
- When we talk about "standards," we are not talking about a mere external rule. We are not talking about Phariseeism that produces whited sepulchers. We are talking about a true walk with Christ that *produces* obedience (John 8:47; 10:27-28; 14:23; 1 John 2:3-4) and separation from error and evil (Ps. 119:128; Ephesians 5:11; 1 John 2:15-17).

"We cannot force obedience."

- This is true, but we can and must reprove, rebuke, and exhort (2 Tim. 4:2), even though this often comes across like "force" to the rebellious.
- Further, we are to chasten and discipline, both in regard to children and to church members. God chastens every son that He receives (Heb. 12:6-7). It could be said that chastening and discipline is type of "force," but whatever it is called, it is Scriptural!
- Further, maintaining standards for workers is not forcing obedience, because no one is forced to serve in the church's ministries. It is a privilege to serve, not a right or a something one can demand. It's like a driver's license. I must meet the qualifications.

"We don't have enough workers."

- One preacher said, "It is the old dilemma, do we have a youth program led by men who are less than we want them to be in order to reach the children from our large families, or do we shut it down because there are no mature men to lead them?"
- Far better to have one qualified musician or SS teacher than a dozen unqualified ones. We can't have God's power and blessing if we don't obey His Word. We are often too hasty; we outrun God; we pick unripe fruit.
- We must build a solid biblical and spiritual foundation rather than building on sand, and building something solid requires time and patience.

“We want to help people to grow by being in a ministry.”

- God’s principle is that they first be proven faithful, then use an office (1 Ti. 3:10).

“I get in the flesh when I try to maintain standards.”

- The preacher needs to put the standards in writing and teach the people and then simply enforce them.

- He needs to train up men and women of God who will stand with him in this matter, and he obtains such people by enforcing standards from the beginning of the ministry.

- Then, whatever workers the church has, are workers who stand with the preachers on these issues. It is not an issue of fighting in the flesh. It is an issue of standing firm for God’s Word because I love God and fear Him more than the people, and I want to build a good spiritual foundation for the house of God, and I love the people enough to enforce the discipline of God’s Word.

- If a preacher can’t do God’s work without getting in the flesh, he should not be in the ministry. The people need strong leaders who stand firm for God’s Word.

Reasons for Maintaining Standards

1. God requires it. The Word of God says that “it is REQUIRED in a steward that a man be found faithful” (1 Co. 4:2). That is God’s requirement, not man’s, and the church leader who does not require that which God requires is a rebel. To be found faithful would encompass faithfulness to church services and functions and fellowship (Acts 2:42; Heb. 10:25; 1 Ti. 3:15), faithfulness in doctrinal purity (Acts 2:42; 1 Ti. 1:3; Jude 3), faithfulness in modesty (1 Ti. 2:9), faithfulness in right relationship to the leaders (1 The. 5:12-13; Heb. 13:17), faithfulness in separation from the world (Eph. 5:11), etc.

2. The workers represent the church and affect its testimony. The community knows who the church workers are, and if they don’t live as they should, they will bring reproach upon Christ. Visitors judge the entire church on the basis of its workers and ministers. This is the theme of Titus 2. Here God instructs every age group in the church: old men, old women, young women, young men. And the focus is on how that their lives affect the testimony of the Lord (Titus 2:5, 8, 10).

3. Having standards for church workers is an important part of raising the level of standards for the entire church. It is not possible for a church to have worker-type standards for every member, but it is possible to require specific standards for those who serve in a ministry.

4. Having standards for church workers is a challenge to the believers. They understand that if they want to serve the Lord in any capacity beyond merely attending, they must live a godly, faithful Christian life.

Standards Our Church Maintains

Following are the fundamental qualifications that our church requires of every teacher and worker (those who do any type of ministry in the church, including usher, taking the offering, musician, singer, giving announcements, public Bible reading, operating the bookstore, working with the sound system):

1. The individual must have a *good Christian testimony* (Phil. 2:15-16). This testimony will be evident in the home, on the job, at school, etc. This includes an *honest* reputation (e.g., paying debts, not stealing, not lying). This includes separation from the world (including worldly music, whether secular or Christian, worldly television and movies, worldly things on the Internet, worldly video games, worldly literature, etc.) (Eph. 5:11; Jam. 4:4; 1 Jn. 2:15-17).
2. The individual must *agree with the church's doctrinal position* (1 Co. 1:10; Acts 2:42; 1 Ti. 1:3).
3. The individual must *be in submission to and have a good attitude toward God-ordained authority: church leaders* (1 Th. 5:12-13; Heb. 13:17), husbands (Eph. 5:22), parents (Eph. 6:1-3), and government (Ro. 13:1). God has established authority. "The powers that be are ordained of God" and those who resist God-ordained authorities are fighting God and will be judged by God (Ro. 13:1-2). Disobedience to and disrespect toward God-ordained authority is lawlessness and anarchy, and it has no place in the house of God and the kingdom of Christ (Col. 1:13; 1 Ti. 3:15). A stubborn spirit toward authority is a lawless spirit. God's Word says, "stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry" (1 Samuel 15:23). Before a woman can serve in a ministry, we want to see that she is in submission with a godly attitude toward her husband. Likewise, a teen toward his or her parents.
4. The individual must be *faithful* (1 Co. 4:2; Heb. 10:25). We look for a good level of faithfulness and dependability in those who serve in ministry. God requires it, and practicality requires it. "Confidence in an unfaithful man in time of trouble *is like* a broken tooth, and a foot out of joint" (Pr. 25:19).
5. The individual must *dress modestly* according to the church's standards (1 Ti. 2:9). We have very clear standards of modesty and believe that dress is a fundamental issue of morality.
6. The individual must have the *ability and gifting to do the assigned task* (Ro. 12:3). Having a love for the Lord and a good testimony is not enough for specific positions of service. One must have the ability and gifting for that task. Not everyone is gifted in music, teaching, working with children, finances, etc. When it comes to church business, I have often wondered why it is so common for the wrong person to be put into a certain position. God's people should strive for excellence.

Implementing and Enforcing Standards

Education

Education is the fundamental tool for setting up and maintaining biblical standards in a congregation.

Education through the church covenant. When we started a new church in 2003, the first thing I did was write out the standards for workers, the reasons for the standards, etc., to use as a teaching tool.

Education through the preaching/teaching ministry. We frequently emphasize the biblical principles of God's requirements for those who exercise public ministry. This theme is woven throughout the church's teaching ministry.

Starting where you are

If you have only one person qualified to teach a Bible class, lead singing, play a musical instrument, work as a deacon, etc., then that is where you start.

Several years ago I decided to work with the spiritually-minded people in our church and leave the others behind if need be, and that has worked out very well.

If we hold the Lord's standards and use only those people who are qualified for a particular position (and the qualifications are not the same for all positions of service), this produces more qualified workers.

It is the slow path, and that can be frustrating, but it is the solid path. Every time I have gotten in a hurry and have ignored the principle of 1 Timothy 3:10 ("let these first be proven"), I have regretted it.

The only other option is to build a house on sand and to see it destroyed. Christ has plainly instructed us about what happens to a house constructed on sand, and we are seeing the fruit of that everywhere among Independent Baptist churches today. They are collapsing because of a weak foundation.

Enforcement

A law that is not enforced is no law. Having rules without enforcement is anarchy.

We cannot enforce God's laws in the world today, but we can enforce them in His house and spiritual kingdom (1 Ti. 3:15; Col. 1:15).

We urge preachers not to back down!

Things That Can Weaken Discipline and Standards

Following are some of the things that can weaken discipline and the maintenance of biblical standards:

Fear of man and pressure from man

One of the most difficult things for a preacher is to enforce God's Word in the face of one's friends and relatives in the church. Some people will actually try to draw close to the preacher and will flatter him with the goal of having him treat them with more leniency.

Sometimes the pressure is real, and sometimes it is only perceived. The devil can create fears when there is nothing to fear.

The more relatives there are in the church family, the greater the danger. I am referring to church members who are related to one another.

As the preacher gets older and if his children and grandchildren are in the church, the danger becomes ever greater that he will either (1) "lighten up" on the standards that he previously enforced or (2) treat his own family differently than he treats other members of the church.

The fear of man is something that must be faced by every preacher on a regular basis. It is not something that you will get victory over once and for all. Each case is a new test of whether the preacher will fear God or man.

See 2 Timothy 1:7.

(1) We see that there are fears; Timothy had them; Paul had them 2 Co. 7:5

(2) We see that fears do not come from God. You can be sure that your fear is not of God. The only fear that comes from God is fear of God and fear of sinning against God.

(3) We see that in God there is victory over fear.

(4) There are two great promises that can help overcome fear: Ps. 138:3; 1 Pet. 5:8.

(5) The promises of God are mighty weapons (2 Co. 10:4-5).

Fear of being overbearing and unreasonable

The preacher must always examine himself to make sure that he is not being overbearing and unreasonable.

But the devil can falsely accuse the preacher of being overbearing and “too hard” when he is only preaching God’s Word and enforcing it as God has commanded.

Becoming weary in well doing

Twice we are told in the New Testament “be not weary in well doing” (Gal. 6:9; 2 Th. 3:13). Obviously becoming weary in well doing is a very real possibility. Once this is stated in the context of church discipline (2 Th. 3:6-13).

This explains why many preachers get “soft” in their old age.

This is why team ministries are important.

- It is good for men of various generations to work together in the ministry. The youth supply energy and zeal, while the elderly supply mature wisdom.
- It is very sad that it is so rare that men can get along well enough to minister in such teams and that the older preachers have to be put out of the ministry to make room for the younger.
- The old men tend not to want to share the authority with the younger men, and the younger men don’t want the help that the older men can supply.
- In Scripture we see Paul the aged and his Timothys working together to the end. Paul wrote his final epistle to Timothy when he was awaiting death, and they were still coworkers in the Lord’s work.

Knowledge of your own failings

Every man knows “the plague of his own heart” (1 Ki. 8:38). Every honest preacher knows that he is not worthy to preach God’s Word and to lead churches. The apostle Paul called himself the chief of sinners (1 Ti. 1:15).

The preacher must remember that he is ministering before God and will give account to God (2 Ti. 4:1-2). He must honor God by being faithful in the ministry, not for his own glory but for God’s glory.

The preacher must examine himself and confess his sins and walk in the light so that he does not become disqualified (1 Co. 9:27).

Anxiety and impatience

It is an easy thing for the preacher to become anxious in light of a need and therefore not wait on God to supply.

The preacher must put God first and honor His Word and wait for Him to supply. God has promised to supply every need, but we must “seek first the kingdom of God” (Mt. 6:33). This is God’s principle. We must stand on God’s Word and wait on Him. He tests faith, as He did with Abraham and the promised son. Abraham and Sarah became anxious and did not wait on God and the consequences are still with us today.

A Matter of Faith

I see the issue of standards as an issue of faith like everything else in the Christian life and ministry. Matthew 6:33

- We teach people to put God first and be faithful to services, and God will take care of them.
- We teach people to tithe and God will take care of them.
- We teach couples to put God first and to live on one salary so that the wife and mother can be a keeper at home as God’s Word instructs.

Likewise, I believe that as a preacher I must honor the Lord’s standards for baptism, church membership, and workers and wait on Him to provide what is needed.

Pursuing Excellence

While on the subject of standards for workers, we would mention the importance of pursuing excellence in the work of God.

We are **soldiers** (Israel’s special forces)

We are **priests** (1 Pe. 2:5; Re. 1:6; 5:10) (Solomon’s Temple - 1 Ch. 15:21-22 with harps to excel ... Chenaniah, chief of the Levites, was for song; he instructed about the song, because he was skilful, 1 Ch. 25:7 “all that were cunning,” the Millennial temple)

- the church is an outpost of Christ’s kingdom (Col. 1:13)
- Continual training (for every ministry: ushering, song leading, Bible reading, public prayer, SS teaching, preaching)

A CHURCH THAT IS STRONGER IN EVANGELISM

- This is how to build a church from scratch.
- This is how to renew a church and move it from a mixed multitude toward a discipling church. Turn your attention away from the old lukewarm members and focus on building the church *properly and scripturally* from this point on.

The Seed

- The gospel seed has power (Ro. 1:16) (see *Sowing and Reaping* for more about this)
- We must sow a lot of it, the more seed sown the more potential of a good crop.
- example of fishing (using many hooks)
 - * An aggressive, well planned “door knocking” program to reach one’s entire area
 - * An effective tract distribution program (obtaining quality tracts, keeping them in stock, teaching the people how to use them, exhorting them to use them)
 - * Preaching on the streets and in market places
 - * Using the church’s web site for evangelism (gospel material, apologetics material)
 - * Gospel Bible studies in homes
 - * Gospel ministries to nursing homes, schools, truck stops, prisons, etc.
- Train workers (don’t browbeat them, lead them, instruct them, encourage them; if you have only one, start with one and pray for more)

Prayer

- Find ways to pray more for evangelism (prayer list, prayer meetings, focus the people’s prayer on souls rather than health, etc.).
- In a study of 576 growing churches, Thom Rainer found that focused prayer was a key factor. In this case, the focus is on evangelism.

“Focusing the church’s attention on intercession for the lost has brought the Lord’s blessings time after time. One pastor shared the thought that, ‘Praying for the lost did more to refocus our church than any single factor. We became a church with an outward focus after being an inwardly focused church for years.’ ... Most churches that are effectively reaching the lost have broken out of the ‘rut’ of prayer-as-usual and have experienced wonderful results brought about by effective emphasis on praying for the lost. ...” (*Effective Evangelistic Churches*, pp. 69, 74).

Plowing

- There can be no crop until the ground is prepared (Israel in 1900).
- The plowshare is the law of God (Ro. 3:19); no one can be saved until he knows how totally lost he is, and this understanding and conviction comes by God’s law.

Consider the situation in Acts 2

- The ground had been prepared by the law for 1,500 years!
- Peter preached with “many other words”
- Peter exposed their sin.
- Peter preached repentance.

Contrast America in the past and today.

Nepal (no law, no light, very hard ground)

Set out to plow the ground in your area. It is just old-fashioned hard work with little visible reward at first.

Patience

- a farmer must be very patient to wait for the fruit (contrast picking unripe fruit)
- Ethiopian Eunuch
- Day of Pentecost (strong background in Scriptures, many had heard Christ preach, Peter used “many other words”)
- How long does it take? It takes as long as it takes! Salvation is 100% of God.
- If an individual is not interested enough to spend time trying to understand the gospel, he cannot be saved and there is nothing you can do about that but pray.

Itinerant ministries

- Paul’s example (Antioch), Second Great Awakening, American frontier, this is how churches were spread when the nation expanded, Nepal
- start Bible studies in various places and see which ones prosper

Study evangelism

- *Sowing and Reaping*
- *Ideas for Evangelism*

A CHURCH THAT IS STRONGER IN ITS VISION FOR CHURCH PLANTING AND WORLD MISSIONS

The heart of the Great Commission is missionary church planting.

“The mark of a great church is not its seating capacity, but its sending capacity.” - Mike Stachura

“A church either evangelizes or fossilizes.”

“The Great Commission is not an option to be considered; it is a command to be obeyed.” - Hudson Taylor

This is the commandment emphasized after Christ rose from the dead (Mt. 28:18-20; Mark 16:15; Luke 24:48; John 20:21; Acts 1:8). This commission is in effect until the end of the age (Mt. 28:20).

- It is the purpose for which Christ came (Luke 19:10). He died that men might be saved, and His death does not benefit men unless they hear the gospel, which is the power of God unto salvation to those who believe (Romans 1:16). Thus, He commanded that the gospel be preached to every person in every nation, and that those who believe be baptized and taught to “observe all things whatsoever I have taught you” (Mt. 28:19).

- It is the theme of the book of Acts. Antioch is the premier example for every church.

- It is the heart of Christian discipleship; every believer is to find his place in Christ’s Great Commission. The Great Commission is a BIG task that requires a lot of workers.

- One of the church’s chief jobs is to train workers for this great harvest.

This is one of the things that attracted me to the independent Baptist movement as a young Christian; its missionary church-planting zeal.

But the missionary vision is gradually dying among IBaptists; fewer men and women surrendering, fewer going to the mission field, fewer new churches planted

Requires a vision by the preachers

Have a vision to start an Antioch church.

- not just to pastor one church but to reach as broad of an area as possible and to start as many churches as possible

A church with such a vision affects the young people

Christ will call them if we will pray (Luke 10:2)

Christ will call them if we emphasize this in the church and home. The parents have to want this for their kids.

This Requires Training Preachers

The training of preachers should be a major emphasis of every church, because they are so necessary for God’s work.

This is one of the greatest needs in every nation. We cannot have good churches without good preachers and teachers. While we must have training for all of the saints, we must have special training for preachers.

Paul's example in training preachers

- 2 Timothy 2:2
- Elders at Ephesus (Acts 20:26-27)
- 1 Timothy (3:15)
- Titus (1:5)

Faithful Men

2 Timothy 2:1-2

- the strength for God's work comes from God (2 Ti. 2:1). We cannot do any spiritual work in our own power and wisdom.
- A church must train preachers for the sake of the future. Paul's preaching training program looks to the future. It is men training other men who train other men, generation after generation. Well-trained men of good Christian character and sound doctrine will keep the church on the right track.
- The training requires teaching the Bible. Paul taught God's Word, not his own opinions and traditions.
- The training requires faithful men. Faithfulness is a major requirement for any position of ministry in the church. Compare 1 Co. 4:2; Mt. 25:21; Lk. 16:10; 19:17. Examples are Lydia (Acts 16:15), Timothy (1 Co. 4:17), Epaphras (Col. 1:7), Tychicus (Col. 4:7), Onesimus (Col. 4:9), Silvanus or Silas (1 Pet. 5:12).

Consider the characteristics of a faithful man

Faithful means **dependable, diligent, having a good testimony**

- e.g., the brother chosen to carry the offering, 2 Co. 8:18, 22
- Contrast Pr. 10:26 and 25:19
- Having a heart to do what you are asked to do *without grudging* (2 Co. 9:7; 1 Pet. 4:9).

A faithful man is a **teachable man**.

- He is not a know-it-all (Pr. 26:16).
- He is not content to learn just a little, just enough to get by.

A faithful man is a man who **serves the Lord from the heart**

- Eph. 6:6-7
- A faithful man serves the Lord from his innermost being, not to please man, not only when someone is watching.

A faithful man **keeps the teaching** (2 Ti. 2:2).

- The teaching is committed to him as a solemn obligation, and he is responsible before God to keep it.
- Many men have a bad habit of changing things because they think they know better, even when they don't.

A faithful man is **faithful in little things** (Lk. 16:10; 19:17).

- An individual's character is seen in how he handles "small" responsibilities.
- This is how the saints are proven (1 Ti. 3:10). They are not proven by being given larger responsibilities and ministries, but by being given smaller ones.

The evidence of faithfulness is what you do when you are no longer under your teacher's authority. Consider the example of Joash (2 Ch. 24:1-2, 15-22). I have seen many men veer away from sound teaching and practice when they got away from their teachers.

Every church leader should continually raise up faithful men.

- This is not man's natural way. In his natural self, man tends to be jealous of his position and authority. He wants other men to be his servants, not his equals.
- But the Word of God shows a different example (Mt. 20:25-28).
- Consider Barnabas, who knew that he needed help and did not hesitate to invite Paul to join him in the ministry (Acts 11:21-26).

Training preachers starts with training children/discipling youth

The future of the church consists of the the children and youth who are saved and discipled and those we win to Christ from outside and bring into the membership.

Our goal is not to lose one young person to the world. We don't always succeed, but this is our goal and this is our focus and passion. We do everything possible to win every child to Christ and present him as a true disciple of Christ. We have had the blessing of seeing a large percentage of our young people grow up to serve Christ.

We deal with this extensively in the chapter "A Discipling Church Disciples Youth" and in *The Mobile Phone and the Christian Home and Church*.

Training preachers requires building the families

To prepare children and youth to be disciples of Christ and faithful men in the Lord's harvest requires building spiritual families.

God's will for each family with children is that it raise a godly seed for His glory (Malachi 2:15).

Contrast parents who have a worldly vision for their children (Pravash)

The home and the church are both ordained of God, and these two institutions should work together for the glory of Jesus Christ. The church should build the home, and the home should build the church.

This must be a major and continual focus. It must permeate every aspect of the church's ministry. The leaders must have a clear plan about how to build strong families .

We deal with this in *Keeping the Kids* and *The Mobile Phone and Christian Home and Church* also goes into all aspects of this important work. It deals with such things as

- the husband wife relationship
- fathers as the spiritual leaders of the home
- mothers as keepers of the home

- child discipline
- protecting the home from the influence of the world
- leading children to Christ
- family devotions
- prayer and fasting

Training preachers requires serious Bible training

The qualified preacher

- He is apt to teach; capable of training others (1 Ti. 3:2; 2 Ti. 2:2, 24).
- He is nourished up in good doctrine (1 Ti. 4:6).
- He is able to protect the flock (Titus 1:9-16).
- He can rightly divide God's Word (2 Ti. 2:15).
- He preaches God's Word with doctrine (2 Ti. 4:2).

We operate a full-time Bible college for the purpose of training preachers. The goal is to train preachers for our church planting ministry.

The Bible training is serious. We tell our new students, "You are going to work harder in this next three years than you have ever worked. If you aren't ready to work like that, you are in the wrong place."

The classroom work is serious. We have 12 hours of teaching per week plus a chapel.

- We teach discipline in the classrooms.
- The students must be on time.
- If they have a responsibility, they must be fully prepared. For example, if they are leading singing in the chapel, they must have everything ready beforehand, including choosing a keyboard player.
- We require their best effort. If they make low grades, I ask them if they have done their best, and if so, that is acceptable, but nothing less is acceptable. They are training for the service of the King of kings.
- We challenge them to aim for excellence (1 Ch. 15:22; Ps. 33:3)
- We aim for understanding; ask questions when they don't understand something (we don't want to train parrots)
- Tests are timed and when the teacher says, "Time's up," they must stop writing immediately.
- We give unannounced tests.
- We train the students not to study just for a test but to learn the material well for the future. The classroom study is just a beginning. They must go over the notes and read every Scripture and make sure that they understand everything that is taught.

One of our goals is to give the students a zeal for reading and learning

- Apostle Paul "The cloke that I left at Troas with Carpus, when thou comest, bring with thee, and the books, but especially the parchments." (2 Timothy 4:13).
- Charles Spurgeon, "Sell your shirt and buy books." He challenged his students to read through Matthew Henry in the year after they graduated.
- The revivalist preacher George Whitefield read Matthew Henry through four times during his lifetime. And this is a man who preached an estimated 18,000 sermons, an average of 500 a year or ten a week.

And the classroom teaching is just part of the overall training of serving in the church. Our church is a Bible college.

The students preach regularly.

- The song leaders and preachers are critiqued by the leaders and by their fellow students.

Weekly leaders meetings

We publish an Bible training curriculum currently consisting of 28 courses that churches can use to educate and disciple preachers (and the congregation as a whole) and that preachers can use for self-study.

Acts
Baptist Music Wars
Bible History and Geography
Bible Times & Ancient Kingdoms
The Bible Version Issue
Daniel
Defense of the Faith
First Corinthians
The Four Gospels
Genesis
Give Attendance to Doctrine
Hebrews
A History of the Churches from a Baptist Perspective
Holiness:
How to Study the Bible
James
Job
Mobile Phone and the Christian Home and Church (Youth Discipleship)
Music for Good or Evil
The New Testament Church
Pastoral Epistles
Proverbs
Psalms
Revelation
Romans
Sowing and Reaping: A Course in Evangelism
An Unshakeable Faith: A Christian Apologetics Course
Understanding Bible Prophecy
Woman and Her Service for God (December 2017)

These courses contain about 9,000 pages of material plus 150 PowerPoint presentations with roughly 15,000 slides.

New courses scheduled for 2018 - Isaiah, Minor Prophets, World History, The Trinity, Effectual Prayer, Jews in Fighter Jets (600 page book, 2,000 slides)

WHERE TO START?

Following are some practical suggestions for implementing steps toward a stronger church:

Outline

Be Patient

Be Ready to Engage in a Difficult Battle

Be Confident of God's Help

Prepare the Church by Prayer

Prepare the Church by Teaching

Develop a Plan for Maintaining a Regenerate Church Membership

Focus on Those Who Are Real Disciples

Reconstitute the Church around a Strong Covenant

Double Down on Evangelism

Aim to Incorporate all the Biblical Elements of a Discipling Church

Be Patient

A church won't be brought overnight to a strong New Testament pattern.

Impatience can cause more harm than good. The goal is not to harm the church and scatter the sheep; the goal is to strengthen it.

Formulate a clear plan before the Lord and then patiently and steadfastly work toward its implementation. It will be a multi-year plan, not a plan for a few weeks or months.

Be Ready to Enter a Difficult Battle

The elements of the world, the flesh, and the devil and the spirit of lukewarmness are not going to like a strong biblical program. There are going to be battles.

In 1962, James Leo Garrett, Jr., called upon Baptist churches to restore discipline, and he acknowledged that it would be a difficult job. He said, "Those who would lead in the renewal of discipline must be thoroughly convinced of its terrible urgency" (Garrett, *Baptist Church Discipline*).

Be Confident of God's Help

The Lord has given the pattern of the New Testament church in His Word. This is the only type of church that pleases Him.

God is ready to help those who want to obey Him, not matter how weak and backslidden the situation might be.

When Christ called Ephesus to repent of losing their first love (Re. 2:4-5) and Pergamos to repent of false doctrine (Re. 2:14-16) and Thyatira to repent of worldliness (Re. 2:20) and Sardis to repent of spiritual deadness (Re. 3:1-3) and Laodicea to repent of lukewarmness (Re. 2:15-18), He stood ready to help them in that business.

If God be with us, who can be against us?

Prepare by Prayer

Prayer is the most powerful spiritual instrument we have, and scriptural prayer will bring God's help into any situation. "The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much" (Jas. 5:16).

To pray in faith is to pray according to God's will as revealed in Scripture (1 John 5:14). Since we know it is God's will that the churches be strong by the pattern of the Bible, the Lord's people can pray with confidence that God will bring this to pass.

The pastor should ask for prayer partners among his friends. Compare Ro. 15:30-32; Eph. 6:19; Php. 1:19; Col. 4:3-4; 1 Th. 5:25; 2 Th. 3:1; Phm. 22; Heb. 13:18-19.

He should call for special prayer meetings. If only a few show up for these prayer meetings, then it should be recognized that this remnant is the true spiritual core of the church. God can answer two or three as well as fifty (Mt. 18:20).

Prepare by Teaching

Teach about salvation and emphasize biblical evidence.

- *One Year Discipleship* covers repentance, saving faith, the gospel, baptism, eternal security, position and practice, the Law and the New Testament Christian, Christian growth and spiritual victory.
- Focus on evidence of salvation (*Steps to a Stronger Church*)

Teach how to study the Bible. Getting the people to be serious Bible students and to each teach how to meditate on Scripture is foundational. (Effectual Bible Student)

Teach about church membership (from Bible and from history) (*Discipling Church*)

Teach about discipline (*Discipling Church*).

Teach a serious discipleship course (*One Year Discipleship*)

Develop a Plan for a Regenerate Church Membership

The foundation for a New Testament church is a regenerate church membership.

Look for a conversion experience with evidence in the thinking and in the life. We have covered the biblical evidences in "A Church That Is Stronger about Salvation." There is not one example in the New Testament of someone who got saved but who did not exhibit *clear* evidence thereof, and that is what we look for. It's what we need to look for in children, in young people, and in older people.

Be particularly careful about receiving children and young people.

Establish a membership class so that every potential baptismal and membership candidate can be prepared with basic instruction. This gives further opportunity to ascertain if the individual is truly saved. The membership class should include teaching on repentance, saving faith, the gospel, baptism, and the church. The church covenant should also be taught and any questions answered. We assign a leader or mature member to go through the membership class with a candidate.

The candidate should be required to agree with the covenant 100%. And this should not be mere lip service. It should be evident to the leaders that the individual truly understands and agrees with the church's stance from the heart.

Candidates for baptism should be carefully interviewed by the church leaders (and their wives if the candidates are female). The candidate should receive a unanimous vote by the church leaders. The candidate is then presented to the church with the recommendation of the leaders that he or she be received for baptism and/or membership. The individual is then received by a church vote.

Establish an inactive membership program.

Focus on Those Who Are Real Disciples

If a church has been careless about membership, it will probably have a lot of members who are not real disciples of Christ according to Christ's definition in John 8:31 and 10:27.

Our suggestion to pastors is to focus most of your attention on those who are disciples.

We want all of the people to come along and to press on higher ground, and we should do everything we can toward that end, but oftentimes this doesn't happen. Those who are "settled on their lees" (Jer. 48:11; Zep. 1:12) tend to remain where they are spiritually. They have heard a lot of preaching and teaching, but they haven't responded and haven't obeyed, and this is evidence of a frightful spiritual condition, as Christ said:

"He that is of God heareth God's words: ye therefore hear *them* not, because ye are not of God" (John 8:47).

Of the rebel, there comes a time when God says, "Let him alone" (Hos. 4:17). See also Matthew 15:14.

The pastor who wants to make an older church strong must keep his focus on those who love the Lord and want to obey Him. He must work with them to make them stronger and educate them well in the direction the Lord is leading him, so he will have a core of people who support his vision for the future.

Reconstitute the Church Around a Strong Covenant

It might be best to reconstitute the church around a strong covenant.

There is a sample covenant in the book *The Discipling Church*.

The covenant should include requirements of membership, standards for leaders and workers, the Lord's Supper, the process of discipline, and the church's statement of faith.

"Examples of the covenants of other churches may be consulted, but churches would do well to personalize and individualize their covenant so that the congregation as a whole owns it as their covenant, not one imposed upon them. Then, when the church has developed a covenant that expresses their commitment to one another and to Christ as his church, the church would vote to dissolve the present membership and reconstitute around those who sign their names to the church covenant. This would be preceded by several announcements of the proposed signing day. I would even encourage the pastor to send a letter to every member of the congregation with the proposed covenant and the decision of the church to reconstitute around it.

"There is a biblical precedent for such action in Nehemiah 9-10. After a time of renewal and confession in Nehemiah 8-9, Nehemiah records the decision of God's people: 'We are making a binding agreement, putting it in writing, and our leaders, our Levites and our priests are affixing their seals to it' (9:38). After listing all the leaders by name, the text states that the rest of the people joined with them (10:28-29). Their 'binding agreement,' or covenant, specified the areas of their lives that needed specific commitments. In that context, the key issues were avoiding intermarriage with the surrounding pagans, conducting no business on the Sabbath, and supporting the temple worship (10:30-39).

"Contemporary covenants would list the areas of commitment contemporary churches see as central to their life together. The people in Nehemiah's day concluded with a summary statement of their commitment, 'We will not neglect the house of our God.' Adopting a church covenant is one way God's people today can say, 'We will not neglect our church.'

"This biblical example gives a beautiful model for contemporary church covenants. The covenant would be their 'binding agreement,' specifying areas of their commitment to Christ and one another. At the conclusion of a service celebrating the adoption of the covenant, the church leadership could be invited to come and sign their names to a roster attached to the church covenant. Then all who are willing to accept the covenant responsibilities would be invited to come and sign. The same document and roster would be taken to shut-in members who are not able to come but are still committed to the church. Those who sign would become the church's membership. Part of the process for adding subsequent members would involve the signing of the covenant, and existing members would be asked to sign their commitment afresh every year. It could become an annual church renewal event" (*Restoring Integrity in Baptist Churches*, Kindle loc. 331).

Double Down on Evangelism

What a weak church needs is new life.

After committing to being very careful about salvation and receiving members, the church needs to find every way possible to get out the gospel.

One pastor friend talks about putting out a lot of fishing lines. The more hooks you have in the water, the more likely it is that you will catch fish. Evangelistic fishing lines are things like the following:

- * An aggressive, well planned "door knocking" program to reach one's entire area
- * An effective tract distribution program (obtaining quality tracts, keeping them in stock, teaching the people how to use them, exhorting them to use them)

- * Preaching on the streets and in market places
- * Using the church's web site for evangelism (gospel material, apologetics material,
- * Gospel Bible studies in homes
- * Gospel ministries to nursing homes, schools, truck stops, prisons, etc.

The evangelism course *Sowing and Reaping* and the book *Ideas for Evangelism* have many practical tips on how to double down on evangelism. These are available from Way of Life Literature.