

I extend my thanks to everybody who is really just jumping into the camp program. We want to make this year the best year for our kids. There is so much at stake with them, and I just really appreciate everybody in this church jumping in the way you always do and helping out every way that you can.

I. Review of God's Plan and the Devil's Deception

Last week, we saw two of the greatest and, I think, the most incredible two verses in the Bible in dealing with the devil. Again, I apologize for preaching on the devil on Mother's Day, but it was one of those things where I did not orchestrate it that way; it is just the way it came up. Do not read anything into it. We learned last week some great stuff, and we talked about Proverbs 16:4-5, why the devil was created. It opened up so many things for someone who really wants to study the Bible and, beyond that, just understand what is going on around us today.

We live in very confusing times as Christians, as God's people dealing with churches, religion, and all the things that are going on out there. It is hard to find a church today that believes the Bible, preaches the Bible, and teaches the Bible. We saw last week how the devil's main thrust, when he wanted to deceive man, would be through religion, through bringing and changing what God said and giving a form of godliness, as the Bible says, but denying the power thereof. If you are going to take the time to lay it out and go through it, you have probably a year's worth of material that will answer so many questions about God and the Bible and, honestly, just the reason why things are the way they are in life.

I started out by showing you that the whole Bible and everything about God is built on God having three separate plans that He wants to invoke, He wants to bring about, and He is in the process of doing that. Everything on planet Earth, we get so dialed into our little world that we live in that we never step outside the box and really see the big picture of things. I told you that God has a plan for the universe. I went into great detail about it. I told you then that God has a plan for planet Earth, and I showed you that out of the book of Isaiah and talked about that. Then I showed you how God has a plan for you. Each one of those plans is distinctly different, yet they are all connected. Each one deals with its own identity, yet they all blend together.

I showed you probably the greatest single concept in the Bible for understanding God's plan, and the foundation of understanding it is simply understanding the concept of free will: that God made you and me as a free moral agent to choose everything in life, to choose Him or not to choose Him. We talked about that at great length. Then I talked about how God did create the devil, that He allowed it to happen. I showed you why He let him come into the world, what God did after he came in, and I showed you for the great purpose of contrast how the darkness of this world will only contrast the detail of the light of God.

II. The Impact of Understanding God's Plan

When you get God's plan, when you begin to understand it—and I know that nobody is ever going to fully understand it; I certainly do not—but you get a glimpse of it. You begin to grasp the concept, and that comes into your life, and you get to the point in your walk with God where three fundamental things change about you as far as your perspective is concerned.

1. All history changes.

When you understand God's plan and you see how you fit into it, the world loses its luster. You will never be the same. Your purpose, your direction, all of your things in your life now change and take a different direction. If I told you this morning that what you are doing right now, if you are doing what God wants you to do and you are dialed into what God has saved you for and you are giving your life to, if I was to tell you this morning that what you are doing in ministry right now is nothing more than a model of what you are going to be doing out into eternity, you would have a heart attack. But that is exactly what has happened. I told you last week, Ephesians 2:6-7, that in the ages to come, He is going to show somebody His goodness and kindness, what He is doing with you right now. It is incredible. God's people are indifferent to that. They could care less about that. They are going on their own way in life, totally oblivious to what is around them and the great plan that God has done and what He is doing. It is incredible.

III. God's Plan Destroys Heresies

I told you last week that God's plan will destroy and tear apart all the heresies that you find in all the false doctrines and the false teachings. I will tell you again, I say it all the time, we live in a world where the devil wants to stop whatever God wants to do in your life. He will always have his drinking crowd. He will always have his carousing crowd. He will always have that dimension of it because there are people that... but I want to tell you something, that is not where he is focused. His focus is that he is seated in the high places. His focus is religion. His focus is to take the clear, simple teachings of the Word of God and make them so hard and complex and so hard to grasp and understand that man will get lost into confusion. He will play to man's old sin nature, and he will actually get man to believe that there is something good in you and me.

So many churches talk about the spark of good in man, that all you have to do is fan that spark, and it goes into a flame of goodness. There is no spark of good in man. The Bible says all of our righteousness is as filthy rags in the sight of God. God does not come down and fan a spark. God lights a fire in you the day you get saved, and it burns by itself if you put the right kind of wood to it. That is the way God does it.

I told you last week, his whole plan is to pull together other groups and cults and religions outside New Testament Bible Christianity. The reason being that the plan of God, when you understand it, will expose them and absolutely destroy them because they cannot stand up against the test when you really understand God's plan.

I showed you last week how ridiculously stupid the concept of Calvinism is: the fact that God would choose some people to go to heaven and some people to go to hell. When you look at that in the light of God's plan, how foolish that looks begins. I am not against, I do not have an axe to grind with any church or any religion. That is not my point. But I am not going to stand up here

and tell you, and I hope you are not so naive that you think that when the devil's main sphere is religion, he is not going to have a lot of false ones out there that are going to have one purpose, and that is to damn man's soul to hell. They cannot stand the test up to the plan of God.

➤ Mormonism

You take Mormonism. They teach the devil and Christ are brothers. They teach that the devil is going to be restored someday. They teach that we are all spiritually born on another planet someplace. All of the good angels are producing spiritual children which somehow filter down into the good people here, and all the bad angels have kids on a planet, and they all filter down to all the bad people here. Of course, in the Mormon teaching, the good angels, they produce the good kids or the white folks, and the devil producing all the bad kids cannot be in the black folks. Ludicrous up against the plan of God. It is incredible what people put out, but it is even more incredible what people believe.

➤ Jehovah's Witnesses

Nobody likes Jehovah's Witnesses. Part of the reason is they do not believe there is a tribulation in the literature in the Christ. They believe they are living in the tribulation right now. To them, Christ is not God; He is a created being, in spite of what I showed you last week in Isaiah 45. They do not believe in a rapture. They do not believe in a millennium. They do not believe in any concept of the plan of God.

➤ Unity, New Age, Scientology

Now you take Unity, New Age, and Scientology. They do not believe anything. They do not even believe that God and the devil are people. They believe they are just an influence, and you become your own God.

➤ Protestant Churches

The Protestant churches, all the churches that came out of the Reformation of the Catholic Church with John Wesley and Zwingli and Calvin and those guys, and now they have all went back into the Catholic Church. No millennium, no time with Christ on this earth, no tribulation, no book of Daniel, no book of Revelation, no second coming of Christ. They are either amillennial or postmillennial. They have no concept of what God is doing. When you understand what God is doing, they do not have a leg to stand on.

➤ Baptist World

You take our own Baptist world. You have Baptist churches that are taking Baptist off their name left and right, moving into the evangelical movement which has become the mainstream of Christianity, and most of them are honestly saved where the other ones are not. But their issue is a total, complete ignorance of the Word of God, and they have lost, they have got the concept of a church. They have a church, but they have lost the concept of the truth of the Word of God. Now they have been, what, 10, 20, 30, 40, 50 years without any light from the revelation of God. So you start to see them going nuts. Some of them believe in theistic evolution today. All of them

have one thing in common. You know what it is? They all reject God's establishment of the nation of Israel, the number two concept of the Bible.

So when you lose sight of God's three plans, when you lose sight of what God is doing universally, and you lose sight of what God is doing locally, and then what God is doing with you and me within all that concept, like it or not, understanding His plan is the key to understanding Him. When you do not understand it, you do not see it, you do not recognize it, the devil is going to have a heyday with you, and that is exactly what he does with God's people.

IV. Mercy and Truth

Today, we are going to move on a little farther into Proverbs chapter 16, and we are going to get into some really good practical truth. Last week was a lot of good doctrinal stuff with a lot of decent practical application, but today is going to be something that these verses fit right down into where you and I live. It really sets the theme, I think, of where you go in Christianity. There is a reason why all of God's people that get saved and claim to be saved—and I am certainly not saying they are not—but there has to be a reason why some of them get to a place in their life where they really, really understand God, and some of them never get to that place. Some of them attain to a level where they really understand what God is doing, and it really does change their perspective. It changes how they look at life, it changes how they look at history, it changes how they look at everything. Then there are some of God's people who just trot along; they never grow, they never go up that spiritual ladder of getting any kind of understanding about anything. There is a reason for that, and I want to show it to you today.

Proverbs 16:6-7

By mercy and truth iniquity is purged: and by the fear of the LORD men depart from evil.

When a man's ways please the LORD, he maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him.

The first part of the verse says, "By mercy and truth is iniquity purged." God's mercy and His truth are for us the two greatest concepts in all the Bible for us as human beings. We can talk about the plan of God all we want. We can talk about all that God is going to do, all He has done, what He is doing right now, and what He is going to do in the future, but I want you to understand: if mercy and truth have not been infused into your life, if there has not been a time in your life when you have accepted the truth of God, the mercy of God through the grace of God, then none of it makes any sense, and none of it is going to do a thing for you.

There are a lot of exciting things in the Bible. I love studying history. I love studying the future. I love studying all the books of the Bible and seeing what God is doing, but I want you to know if it had not hit my heart first and God had not changed me by His mercy and purging my iniquity, all of it would be of no avail. I always love in the Bible mercy and truth. I always love in the Bible when God uses two great concepts or two great words together to illustrate how they are connected and how you cannot understand one without the other, how in life you cannot separate the two, and they have to work together in all that we do. He talks about mercy and truth. You cannot separate those.

There are some great examples in the Bible.

John 1:17

For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.

You see, there is one: grace and truth. You cannot separate those two. When you find those two or words like that, it has always been a blessing to me because it shows me how they are connected together. Truth is the Word of God. When we talk about absolute truth, we are talking about the Bible. It does you no good to have the Bible if you do not have grace in dealing with people to use the Bible. It is more than just having truth; it is the ability to understand that putting out truth takes grace. You learn that you may have the truth, and it may be hardline truth, and it may be truth that is absolute, and it may stand against all the errors of other religions. But you never get to the place where you do not have the grace to understand that people get into their world of false religions. If it was not for God's grace of somebody coming into your world, into your life, and spending the time and showing you the truth, you might be right there in a pew with them this morning.

Grace and truth. You find some churches that have grace; they love everybody, but they have no truth. Then you find some churches that have truth, but they have no grace. A couple of churches down in Florida talk about having truth but no grace. They believe the Bible is the Word of God. One of our friends that comes to Thursday Night Bible study went down there to visit sometime to preach down there. He was going down to one of the sermons, and his hair, it is not long, it is a little long, not bad. But down there, if it is not a buzz cut, you are an apostate. He asked one of the guys—now they do not even know him. They do not know if he is saved, if he is lost. They had no idea that he was a saved man who really knows the Bible, who really loves God and loves the Word of God. He comes on Thursday Night. He does not come to church here yet, but he comes to Thursday Night, and he is a great kid, and I have known him for years. He asked one of the guys where the restroom was, and the guy looked at him and said, "Well, we have two, a man or a woman, which one would you like?" because his hair was too long in his estimation. Now there is a guy, and that church has got the truth. Oh, do they have the truth? But they have no grace. You cannot get yourself into a little bubble where you think everybody has to be just like you and wear their hair just like you and dress just like you. If God waited until you looked like Him, dressed like Him, and cut your hair like Him, we would all be in hell this morning. You can have the truth, but you have got to have the grace to administer the truth. You cannot separate those two words.

I will give you another one in John 4:24, the concept of worship.

John 4:24

God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.

Spirit and truth. There is another one. Worship, real biblical worship, depends on two things: your spirit and God's truth. I drive down the street all the time, and I am not picking on anybody; I am just telling you, I want to know what is real. Maybe you do not. Maybe you are naive enough to think that everybody out there is a good person. We know that is not true. All I want is

the truth. I want to know what is right. I drive down the road, and I see marquees on churches: "Seven o'clock worship service," "Sunday morning worship service." He gets up and he says, "Okay, now we are going to worship God with our tithes and our offerings." Now I am not picking a fight with anybody, but I want to know what the Bible says about it. The Bible says real worship has nothing to do with any service we have. Real worship has nothing to do with the offering we took. If I thought it did, I would take up several more. Worship does not have anything to do with anything that we physically do. Worship is in your spirit with the Word of God, and you ought to live in a state of worship 24 hours, seven days a week. Relegating the worship of God to a service, then what do you do when you leave? Leave your worship there after you take the offering up? Is the worship done now? Worship is a state of being based on two words: you cannot separate your spirit, God's truth. When you understand those things, things become clear.

I have a number of goals for you. I may not accomplish them all in your life, but as your pastor, I have a couple of goals for you. Real worship is simply for you to understand what is real and what is not. I am not asking you to change what is not real to try to make it real. I am not out to change what is not real to make it real because that would be an impossible task, and that is not my job. But my job through the Word of God is to point out to you, my people, that you may learn to be in any situation, look at it, see it, and immediately know it is a good one or it is a bad one. That is invaluable. Do you know how many heartaches that would have solved in people's lives, God's people's lives, if they would have just had the ability to look at this or look at that and see this and see that and know if it is of God or if it is not? I cannot tell you the problems that would solve. I may never get there with you, but that is where I want to be. Fundamentally, no Bible truth, no worship. So we conjure up a false worship system that everybody just kind of falls into because they do not have the truth of God's Word either.

John 14:17, you have another term, the Spirit of truth. That simply says that real truth will always come through God's Spirit. The definitive chapter on the Spirit of God is in John 16. Seven things in that chapter the Holy Spirit of God does for you. We find the word, "Word of truth." The Word of God is the only truth on planet Earth. There is not any other truth. A guy told me one time that was a highly educated professor, he said, "You know what? I believe the Bible is truth, but I do not believe the Bible is all truth. I think there is more truth outside the Bible." Well, let me give you my take on it and my position on it so we are clear on it. There is no other truth outside the Word of God. All truth is relegated to that book. If it is not in that book, you better be careful because it is not truth. That is the only book on this planet that God ever wrote to man. He did not need any help.

Ephesians 4:15 says, "Speaking the truth in love." Now that is a good one, truth in love. You see, real love is based on real truth. When you really love somebody, it is not based on what you want to get from them, what you want them to do for you. Real love is based on real truth, and that truth is you love somebody unconditionally. I do not love you because you are good looking. I do not love you because you are influential. I love you because God loves you. I love you when you are not good. When you are good, I love you any way it goes. It does not matter to me because that is unconditional, and real love is based on truth. The truth is none of us are always lovable.

Philippians 2 says, "like minded." There is another good one. Be like Christ in your thoughts, have His mind. 2 Peter 3:15 says, "longsuffering." That means that you go through stuff with people for a long time. There have been people that I went through 10, 15, 20 years with struggles, helping them, trying to help them. Isaiah 63:7 talks about lovingkindness. You see, real love will not only be based on truth, but real love will always display kindness. You cannot have real love towards somebody if you are not kind to them. "Well, I love you." Real love is displaying that love through kindness. I love words like that that go together.

Here you have, dealing with our salvation, mercy and truth. The mercy of God can only come to us through the truth of God's Word. Without a doubt, and I am telling you, the hardest concept of God for me to try to grasp is the mercy of God. I know the plan of God is way outside of my reach and all the details, but I want to tell you something, it is a lot easier for me to grasp the overall concept of God's plan than it is for me to grasp the concept of God's unending mercy, the depth of His mercy to man. It is beyond my ability to grasp that concept.

Man uses His holy name as a cuss word. Man gets up and declares to the world that He is dead, like Nietzsche did. Man ridicules Him all day long. Man blasphemes Him. Man calls Him sadistic. Man claims that He never existed. Man claims that He is a phony. For 6,000 years, man has denied Him, abused Him, laughed at Him, lied about Him, ridiculed Him, blasphemed Him, told people dirty, filthy jokes about Him, mocked Him, rejected Him in every possible way. In His own people, in the nation of Israel, they blamed Him, they abused Him, they rejected Him. God's people, you and me, we use Him and then we dump Him. We sell Him out. We take all that He has for us and give absolutely nothing back. And yet, "by mercy and truth is iniquity purged." Now explain that to me.

I have a lot of people out there, and I deal with them all the time. They just cannot grasp the concept that they cannot lose their salvation. All my life, all my ministry, I have tried to help people get to that point. But I understand the way they are because I am a lot like them. I have a tremendous doubt in my own life about my salvation, but it is just the opposite of their doubts. Their tremendous doubt is, "I am afraid God is going to take it from me for something I do." My tremendous doubt and fear is, "Why in the world would God want me in the first place? What do I have to offer to Him? Why would He even look down and consider me?" Calvinists say, "Well, God picked some, God did not pick the others." The truth of the matter is, God should not pick any of us. This is grace. Mercy. There is mercy in truth. The depth of His mercy is beyond comprehension.

When I talk about the depth of God and us getting to a place in our lives where we really understand God, most people think I am talking about just really learning the Bible. That would be true to a certain extent, but it is so much more than that, my dear friend. It is the drive behind you wanting to learn the Bible. It is the depth of you and me having an understanding to some degree of the depth of God's mercy and His love for us. That is what drives you. That is what keeps you when the world wants to suck you in. That is when things in life want to take you off your course. That is when we are so easy to get off course. That is what holds you. That is what keeps you. That is what will never let anybody, anything pull you from the arms and the love of

God when you understand the depth of His mercy and truth to you. It is the depth of you and me having an understanding of the depth of God's mercy and His love for us through His truth.

V. The Fear of the Lord and Departing from Evil

The second part of that great verse says, "And by the fear of the Lord men depart from evil." How many times in my life, after I preached a message, somebody has come up and said to me, "Well, you know what? I do not think you ought to yell. I do not think you ought to try. You preached on hell tonight. I do not think you ought to scare, try to scare people into heaven. I do not think you ought to get up there and rant and rave and tell people there is a burning hell and there is this and there is that. I just do not think that is the way to do it. How do you, how do you, that is not really the love of God."

Let me tell you what a definition in the Bible of the love of God is. You know what the love of God is? It is not your mealy-mouthed concept of some guy walking around with a handshake like a marshmallow. The love of God is God pouring out His wrath on His Son for you and me. That is the love of God. Do not you tell me that. The Bible says Noah moved with fear in the preparing an ark of the saving of his household. Fear is the most healthiest emotion you have. It keeps you from falling off the roof. It keeps you from killing yourself in a car. It keeps you from doing something or taking too many pills or doing this or doing that. The Bible says, "by the fear of the Lord, men depart from evil." Bob Jones Sr. used to say, "You are better off to be hell-scared than hell-scorched." That is a great verse. But some of God's people just cannot do it. They cannot depart from evil. Now I am not saying you live your life perfect. None of us do. But you know what I am talking about. Some of God's people just hang on to some sin in their life, and they just want to take that thing all the way with them, and I am telling you, they just do not have a depth to them. It takes a depth of understanding God's mercy, what He did for you, the mercy and truth as it goes together in your life and my life. We do not deserve one thing that we have.

In any church, you will find three kinds of people. I have seen it all my ministry.

2. You will find those who know what is happening.
3. You will find those who wonder what is happening.
4. Then you will find those who could not care less what is happening.

In a good church, you want to run about 85, 10, 5. Eighty-five know what is happening, 10 wonder what is happening, and keep that last one down as low as you can. Our relationship with God, our depth, will really come down to just one thing: our understanding of His mercy and grace and His truth in our lives.

2 Corinthians 8:9

For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich.

Do you know that? Do we? I bet you almost every child of God that you are going to meet probably has that verse marked in their Bible. They do not have it memorized. Probably on your

little prayer cards, most of you, if not all of you, have that verse. It is one thing to write it and remember it and quote it. It is something else to really believe it.

Do you understand that? Do you realize there was a day when the angels walked into the throne room, and Jesus was gone? There was a day when God's presence, from what He was brought into this world, filled the expanse of heaven. He basked in a fellowship of light with His Father. It was a day when the angels walked into God's throne room, and Jesus was not there. He left the throne of glory, came down to this earth. He left all of the riches, came down to be poor, that you and I might become rich through His poverty. Now we just take that and do not even say thank you. We just take that and do not even look back. We take that and then complain about when we do not get what we want the way we want it. We take that and then we get mad at God because it did not work out the way we thought it should.

Our lives are such a tender balance. To keep us on track in that balance, I personally always find I need to be overbalanced. I did not say out of balance. I found it in my life that is a good thing when I am overbalanced. Overbalanced in a sense of what He did for me. The price that He paid, the love that He displayed, His unending mercy, His grace to me will always, hopefully in my life, outweigh the things of this world. As the old song says in your hymnal there, I think it is on page 204, a great song: "Turn your eyes upon Jesus, and the things of this earth will grow strangely dim in the light of His glory and grace."

VI. Enemies at Peace: The Power of Truth

Look at Proverbs 16:7.

Proverbs 16:7

When a man's ways please the LORD, he maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him.

Boy, here is another good verse. This is a great practical verse, and I want you to learn some things about this verse today. My goal is for you to be able to see something and to recognize when it is the real deal and when it is not. This verse in English literature would be called an enjigmatic verse. An enjigmatic verse, that is a \$25 word, it simply means that it is a verse or a statement that is hard to interpret or mystifying in what it means. It does not necessarily mean exactly what you are reading it to be. For in truth, the verse as you would say there, "When a man's ways please the Lord, it maketh his enemies to be at peace with him." Oh, I could see Joel Osteen having a great time with that one. But in truth, when you think about it, it is not so the way you want to take it. Stephen's steps in Acts chapter 7, they definitely pleased the Lord. It did not help him with his enemies. They took him out and stoned him. The Apostle Paul's steps certainly pleased the Lord all of his life, but it was not true in his case either. They were after him, hounded him, beat him up several times, and finally in 2 Timothy 2:4, the last thing he ever writes, he is in a Roman prison going about to get his head cut off.

Now the answer to this is something you need to understand in the phrase of an old English phrase, "to be at peace." It does not mean your enemies will make friends with you or even make peace with you. That is not what the verse is saying. It is saying that when you walk in the book

and you have the Word of God in your life and you understand God and what He is doing in your life, and your life is based on that book, it will make and cause your enemies to hold their peace. There will be nothing they can say to you. They will have to be at peace with you. The reason for that is there is no argument to sound Bible doctrine. There is no answer to it. Somebody may argue with you and keep something going if you allow it, but there will never be a legitimate answer to Bible truth. The quicker you learn that and the faster you understand that, the better off you will be in dealing with people because you realize that when you have the truth and the book is what it claims to be, nobody can stand up to you when it comes to that book.

That is why when you deal with people in any situation, I have told you people in the people ministry this, I have talked about it on Thursday night, when you start to work with people or deal with people or get into a conversation with people, you are always based on whatever you give them on the principles found in the Word of God. There is no room for your homespun theology. There is no room for grandma's recipe for chocolate chip spiritual cookies.

This is a great answer to why people will never deal with you face to face. It is an incredible verse. There are times in your life, especially if you ever get into ministry, but some of you experienced it already. There will be times in your life where people will talk about you behind your back. They will never come to you face to face. The reason why they will not is because they do not have a leg to stand on when it comes to facing the issues that they are involved in.

I will give you a couple of examples. All my life I have seen these principles in action, this verse in action, all the time. All my ministry, you get guys who come up into ministry, and 98% of them, guys and gals, but 90% of them, they are just right on target with what they need to do. Maybe they never set the world on fire, but they understand the concept. But you are always in the ministry. Every church has them. I have seen it all my life. Everybody gets to the point where you have people that come into your ministry who get an idea that they can live outside the principles of the Word of God, but they do not apply to them. They make a foolish mistake. They think they are an exception to the rules that God laid down.

In my ministry, I have seen young guys that want to start a church. I was talking to somebody this week, I forget who it was, and I would say, "You know what, boy, I will tell you, I get calls and emails and phone calls, and I was probably over 150 some guys that in my life, God has been good to me and allowed me to establish and put into the ministry." Any pastor does it. I do not care how good your church is. You are not going to bat a thousand. You are going to have guys who do a great job and do great, and you are going to have some who do not. It is just the way that it is. But for you and for me, as God's people, you need to always be able to understand when God is in something and when He is not.

Starting a church is an honorable thing. It really is. Paul was the first man who we have a record of that started Gentile churches. There were already some churches in play, Antioch, but we do not know who started that. So our record picks up with Paul, and he was the apostle to the Gentiles, and his whole job was starting Gentile churches. This church right here, if we would trace our lineage back, I tell you this all the time, was what we believe. Where we stand based on the biblical principles. We run ourselves right back to Antioch in Acts chapter 12 and 13. No

question about it. It is an honorable thing, but I want to tell you something. Building a church is the hardest thing you will ever do. There are a lot of guys that want to get into the ministry and start a church because they think they do not have to work. They will see a pastor on a Sunday morning or Wednesday night or whatever he does, here and there. He will think, "Man, that is the job I need to have." They go to work eight hours and come home and put in a hard day's work, and they say, "Man, I would like to have a job like the preacher has got." You would not want it for long. Building a church is the single hardest thing I think that there is ever to do. Somebody says, "Well, you know, being a president, being a president, a piece of cake. You just push the button and nuke everybody." You cannot do that as a pastor, though I am looking for the button sometimes.

Young guys have no idea what it takes, no idea what you face. When it comes to starting a church, the principles are very clear in the Bible how it needs to be done. The Bible is very clear on it, and this church was started exactly the way it says in the Bible. Now watch how this works here. I want to make a point here. I am just trying to show you how you see the difference based on the principle. This is a great example.

5. All churches are started by other New Testament local churches. There is never a church in the New Testament that was not started by another New Testament local church. There just is not any.
6. When you want to start a church, you do not go out; you get sent out.
7. This is the killer: you do not decide that you have been called. You do not decide that you have been called to start a church. When you go to Acts chapter 13, you will find it when Paul and Barnabas and Silas are ready to go out. It was not Paul who said, "Well, I am Paul." He, you know what he did? Here is the guy who was the apostle to the Gentiles who started every New Testament church and is responsible for everyone today. When God gave him his mandate and said, "You are going to be unlike any other man on this planet, you got the revelation about the church from Me to you. You did not get it in a book. You did not get it from anybody else. I gave it to you, and you are My man." You know what he did? He went and got into a New Testament local church at Antioch. Even though he had the mandate from God of who he was and what God was going to do, he knew God had a plan. So the greatest Christian that ever lived who built all the churches submitted himself to a New Testament local church. He did not go in and say, "Hi, guys, I am Paul. Just got off the mountain with God. I am going to start all the churches. Just wanted you to know I will be here for a couple of weeks till my big bus gets painted. Then I will be on my way." No, you know what he did after he got the revelation from God so you and I would never screw it up? He went into that church in Antioch and waited until God spoke to the leadership of that church and said, "Separate me, Paul and Barnabas." Now that might not fit into somebody's personal agenda, but in the Bible, that is how it is done.

You do not call yourself into the ministry. How dangerously stupid is that? God calls you through the leadership of the New Testament local church you are serving in. When I went into ministry in 1976, I was working for my brother-in-law at a grocery store as a produce manager. I had no idea. I told God, "I will go do whatever You want to do." Mel Sabaka had left. I was left in

Canton there in that church, and I was doing exactly what I was supposed to do. One night I got a phone call from my pastor and said, "We think you are ready to go, and somebody has called and they are interested, and we want to send you out." I am not talking about something that I just tell you to do that I do not do myself.

When you do it your way, you may be the nicest guy on the planet, but you know what? You are never going to know for sure if it was you or God who did it. When it goes through the tough times, and it goes through the bad times, and you go through the struggling times, the devil is going to have a heyday with you because you do not know for sure deep down inside if God did it or you did it. No matter how we try to justify it, you forsake the mother church that should be your support system. You have no pastor. I do not know what I would have done my first five years in the ministry, and on beyond that. Mel's phone bill must have been \$1,000 a month. I called him all the time, "Man, I am up against this. Now what do I do here? What am I going to do now? Where do I go now? How do I handle this?" Can you imagine going into a scenario where you cut yourself off from the very support system God gave you? Now that is either blatant stupidity or blatant arrogance. I never would have made it.

Psalm 127:1

Except the LORD build the house, they labour in vain that build it: except the LORD keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain.

I was talking to Bubba when he was over there remodeling our bathroom. We are going to have an open house here. Come use the bathroom when it is done. Everybody else is having one. We were talking about some things, and I said, "You know what? I was doing something the other day, and it just hit me. If you are a builder and you are building a house and you want to cheat the guy you are building for, you are going to save money that you can make by buying substandard material. You are going to pocket the money. You are going to cheat the guy whose house it is, but he is going to wind up with a lot of substandard material." You know it is the same thing when you start to build God's house and you do not do it God's way. You know what you wind up getting? A bunch of substandard material. The house of God is now built on substandard material that cannot get the job done.

God has a way He does things. I do not always like the way He does them, but it is the way He does it. You cannot use the Bible to not drink and preach on, "You should not drink." You cannot use the Bible and getting up and saying, "Well, you know what? You should not carouse around and fornicate and smoke dope and all that stuff." You cannot use the Bible and get up and say from the pulpit, "You know, you should not hang out with the world, be ye separate, and you should not go." You have got to have some great convictions, and I do not go eat when they do this or they do that because I have got standards. Then when it comes to starting a church, you just throw out the principles that you do not like because they do not fit what you want to do.

Now here is my point, Proverbs 16:7. So they all run as fast as they can from any real church and play and pretend they are okay. "God called me. God put it in my heart." The two greatest words that say, "I am really screwed up, and I do not know what I am doing." No, He did not. You did it. There is only one way God does it: that is by the book. If those guys, whoever they may be, all

down through my ministry came in on a Thursday night and tried to defend their actions, they would be blown out of the water so fast because the Bible makes them be at peace. Nothing to say. You can get up and say whatever you want to say, and then when we come right back to the Bible, the Bible says, "This is the way it is done." End of story. Makes you be at peace. Hold your peace. Nothing to say.

Dealing with people involved in cults, here is another one. You never deal with them on their issues. You always deal with them on the Bible issues. Most of you do not know this, but because a false religion or a cult is phony and not based on the Bible, just like the guy who goes out and tries to start a church outside the structure of the New Testament, you always have these loose ends hanging out someplace. Every cult and false religion will have an undefendable position. They will have an undefendable position because they are not basically based on the Bible. When you are not based on the Bible, no matter what you do, there will be places in your life, based on the Bible, where you are undefendable, and you cannot defend your position. Find out what that is, and they are at peace with you. You make them. You make them because they have no answer to you. Oh, they may try to argue up one side and down the other, but there is no legitimate answer. You make them be at peace, and they have to hold their peace. That is because what the Bible has is truth.

I can take you to the Bible, and by example and by principles and by model, I can defend everything we believe in this church and everything that you stand for, we stand for. I am telling you right now, I do not have to add a thing, subtract a thing, or change a thing to make it fit. Thursday night Bible studies are an open forum. Any question you want to ask about the Bible. I do it for two reasons:

8. For you, so you might be able to ask any question you want to ask to learn the Bible.
9. The second reason I do it is for me.

No man who is crooked, no man who has an ulterior motive, you will never find a wishy-washy Baptist or a cult leader open up a Bible study to anybody who can ask them questions. They are not going to put themselves in a position where you could ask them something in front of everybody that they cannot defend. They are not going to do it. You kidding me? They are never going to allow themselves to be asked by people, "Why do you believe this? Why do you do it this way? Why do you do it that way?" It only takes one Bible believer in the crowd to ruin their night. You can ask me whatever you want. I am not afraid of anything because it is all based on the book.

We have in our bookstore back there a book called *The Answer Book* by Sam Gibb. I have known Sam Gibb. We were in Canton together, in Mel's group together. Sam was one of the early graduates from Pensacola University, Ruckman School, back in the late 60s, early 70s. I have known Sam for years. Sam wrote a number of books, but one of the books we have on our book stand back there is that little blue book called *The Answer Book*. That book deals with 62, I think 62, 62 of the accusations about the King James Bible. Old Sam takes every one of those accusations, lays it out, states what it is, and then takes you through the Bible and shows you why the Bible is right and why they are wrong. Sixty-two. It is number one on my hit parade for

anybody who wants to get into that issue. It is called *The Answer Book*. It should be called *The Shut Your Mouth Book* because when he is done with the issues, there is nothing to say. He makes his enemies be at peace with him. There is nothing they can say to come against that. It is right in the middle of the rack there if you want to get one.

One of the things I always enjoyed about Dr. Ruckman. He took cheap shots behind his back all of his life. People hated him. On the website, there were 89 pages the last time I looked of anti-stuff against him. The great keyboard cowards. Most people do not know this. For almost 40, 50 years, Dr. Ruckman had a standing offer that anybody that wanted to debate him on anything that he believed, he would pay their plane fare to Pensacola, put them up in a hotel, buy their food, and have a public forum where they could tackle him on anything that he wanted. In 40 to 50 years, I think, and John Busquets correct me on this, I think there were only four or five guys who ever took him up on it. You listen to those four or five debates, you will understand why nobody else ever did. Fifteen minutes into it, it was over. There was nothing to say. I watched him put away an evolutionist one time. I timed it: 42 seconds. It was over. Although it went on for another hour and a half, it was over. All that guy did was backpedal. He could not get anything going because he was destroyed. You know why he was destroyed? Because he went up against a book that is absolute, that when you believe it, you follow its principles. Nobody has got one thing to say about it. It is over. It is over.

VII. The Importance of an In-Depth Relationship and God's Pattern

These two verses show you the importance of an in-depth relationship with God. Again, I use those two examples, almost extremes of each other, but I want you to see there is a process by which you can look at any circumstance and ask yourself, "Is it real or is it not?" We have a lot of people, when they go into other churches, the first thing they ask is, "What Bible do you use?" That is a start. You are going to make your decision based on a very good question. That is good. Do not stop there. Look at everything a person does, especially if you are going to be part of it. Do you want to lend yourself to something, no matter what it may be, that is not going to be done the way God wants it to be done, no matter what it may be?

These two verses show you the importance of an in-depth relationship with God. When it comes to real Christianity, you have to have a depth to you. When you have a goal all of your life to understand and to dig deeper every day to understand God and for yourself personally and His mercy through His truth—remember you cannot separate the two, they go together—it will take you to a level of a relationship with God that will open up all things to you when you take responsibility for them.

My job here is to build leadership. I look for every man, every woman that comes into this church. If there is even what I suspect is a speck of leadership, I want to cultivate it. I look at you young kids and girls and guys, and already I see tremendous potential down the line for leadership. Leadership is what makes Christianity work. Leadership is what makes Christianity fire on all eight cylinders. But I want to tell you something. Real leadership is not about ability. It

never has been, and it never will be. We make that fatal mistake. Real leadership is not about ability. Real leadership is about you taking responsibility and having to make the hard judgment calls in life when you have to make them. Realizing that real leaders have to separate themselves to a certain degree because there may be times when you have to separate from a circumstance or a situation because of the fact that you know it is not going the way God wants it to go. That is leadership. You do not find a lot of people with that kind of ability in the sense of responsibility. The two go together.

You learn that everything in your life needs to be solid on biblical principles. This is why I harp at you. I preach to you. I give them to you all the time. I make you on a little 3x5 card. Everything we do has to go back to a biblical reason why we do it. Are we doing it biblically, or are we doing it the way we want to do it? Last week I told you that the devil will walk in one side of the door and Christ in the other side, and they came up here. We talked about it Thursday night. I made the reference last week, and Thursday you could not even tell them apart. But I will tell you how you would tell them apart. You tell them apart by what comes out of their mouth. The devil, he claimed to love God. He claimed to love His Word. He would go to church. He would probably even start some. But when he speaks, he would be changing any principles and sidestep it to do what he wants to do in Jesus' name. The Lord, on the other hand, it is real simple. He never violates His own principles. He stays with them, and they are absolute.

That very thing right there will all be the key to telling you that looking at anything, "Is it real? Is God in it, or is God not in it?" Do not look at the person. Do not look at how nice they are. Do not look at this. Do not look at the friendship. Do not look at any of that stuff. Go back to the principles. Is it based on what the principle says, or is it not? I do not change the principle to do what I want to do or believe what I want to believe. I will change my attitude of heart and what I believe to bring it in line with what the principles say. The ability to justify or violate God's principles of the Bible in anything we do. People do it all the time. When you stay with the book as the absolute accountability in our lives, then your enemies, they may hate you. They may reject you. They may lie about you and talk about you. They may plan against you. But they will never face you because they are at peace with you. Your stand on truth has made them hold their peace face to face, and they will never come to a confrontation anywhere where there are any open Bibles. They have to hold their peace because in front of a crowd of open Bibles, there is absolutely nothing to be said to justify what they believe or what they have done.

These two verses here, which are great verses, go right back to Proverbs 16:1.

Proverbs 16:1

The preparations of the heart in man, and the answer of the tongue, is from the LORD.

God never, and I say never, violates His own principles, and you and I will never be an exception to that rule, even though many times we foolishly sometimes try to convince ourselves that we are.

The Bible says, "Except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain to build it." There are four houses in the Bible.

10. There is a house in Israel. God had a plan for Israel to build them. They wanted to build it their own way. We all know what happened to them.
11. Your own home physically. When you are the spiritual leaders of your home, your children, the home grows up being strong with the Lord. When it is not, it is not. A home will be built on the principles.
12. Your body is the temple of God. It is God's house. You build it the right way. Your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost. It is in you what you have of God. You are not your own. You are bought for a price. You build it the right way. You build a strong house for God spiritually. They have to be built on the principles. There is no way around it. God designed them. God gave the principles to go along with it, and that is what we have got to do.
13. God's church.

Except the Lord build a house, we will all labor in vain to build something that God is not building. I am going to tell you again, in all four houses, God builds it by the principles. He does not just give you some general outlines and suggestions. He gives you some hardline principles that work. Do it that way, He builds it. Do it any other way, you are building it.

I love you to death, and I would do anything in the world for you, but listen to me. Do not ever want something so bad that you convince yourself that God is in it when He is really not. That is the best advice I could give you. Do not ever get to the place in your life that you want something so bad that you actually delude yourself that you are the exception to the rule, that God has got rules for everybody else in what they do, but because it is you, He is going to lift you out of that and make you special. That is not going to happen.

One of the greatest lessons I ever learned: that in everything God does in the Bible, there will be an exact pattern to it. You just learn the patterns. The only way you know something is of God is if you follow the pattern. This is one of the greatest things you will ever learn. That is good advice from a long time ago when Christians and preachers still followed and believed the Bible. It may be out of touch with your plans and modern-day Christianity, but it has never not been part of God's plan.

As a young man or a woman in this life, I have got some great advice for you found in Hebrews 8:5 that God gave to one of the greatest men that ever lived when he was going to do a work for God.

Hebrews 8:5

Who serve unto the example and shadow of heavenly things, as Moses was admonished of God when he was about to make the tabernacle: for, See, saith he, that thou make all things according to the pattern shewed to thee in the mount.

God has a pattern for everything you want to do, no matter what it is in life. That book has, has, and holds the pattern for everything: for starting a church, there is a pattern; for taking a new job, there is a pattern; for finding a spouse, there is a pattern; for training up your children, for dealing with people, there is a pattern; for dealing with your troubles and your heartaches and your depression, for dealing with the cults, there is a pattern; for dealing with your family, there

is a pattern; for you to help with your kids and your husband and your wife, there is a pattern; training up leaders, there is a pattern; winning people to Christ, there is a pattern; how to study your Bible, there is a pattern; how to rightly divide the word of truth, there is a pattern. Christian life is no more complicated than this: learn the patterns, and in everything you do, follow the pattern. Now how hard is that?

We make Christianity so hard. You know why? I will tell you why. Every one of us has a tendency to think that we are an exception to the rule. We think because of who we are, our situation is different. "Well, when I do this, I do not have to do that because God put it in my heart." No, He did not. He will never, never put it in your heart outside the principles. That is a delusion that you have convinced yourself because deep down inside you want to do what you want to do. He never violates His own principles. The depth of God is nothing more than understanding the pattern of God. That will always come back to understanding the depth of His mercy and His truth.

Father, we thank You for these two great verses. Lord, they are loaded and help these people in everything in life, everything in life. Lord, there are so many examples we could have looked at today. Help them to understand first of all the depth of Your love and mercy and Your truth. Help us to grasp it, Father, as hard as that is. Help us just to see a glimpse of it, a glimmer of it, just enough to show us that everything in this world that glitters is certainly not gold. Help us to see where the real gold is versus the fool's gold of the world. Father, I ask You, Lord, to help these kids. Help them to grow up. Lord, You have a plan for them. You want something for them to do, and the devil wants to stop them dead in their tracks. He will do it. He will do it by getting them to follow their own heart and their own conscience instead of following the pattern to the Word of God. Lord, there have been many a good man, many a good woman who wound up on the ash heap simply because they started out doing it their way and foolishly convinced themselves that they were the exception to the pattern found in the Bible. Lord, we love You. I love these people. Lord, bless us today as we go out and do the work for You. Thank You, Father, for this church and for its stand and for the men and the women who are leaders who can make the hard choices, who every day of their life will stand up and say, "You know what? This is what the Bible says. This is the way it is going to be done." That is the key. Help us, Father. We love You. Thank You for all You have given us. Bless us now the rest of this day throughout this week. Pray for the ones that are on the hospital list and the list, Father, for those that are hurting. We pray Your blessings upon it all. In Jesus' name, for His sake, we ask it. Amen. God bless you. You are dismissed.