



The need for a Modern Reformation

Selected Scriptures

May 16, 2021

Let me begin with a brief word of prayer and then we'll get into tonight's topic. Father, I want to thank you for this dear church. It's, this church is beloved to you because its members have been accepted in the beloved. We are hidden in the Lord Jesus Christ. We are united to him, and his righteousness covers over us. Our sin has been forgiven. It's been done away with because of his perfect sacrifice on the cross. So we are a blood-bought people. We come before you in gratitude tonight, so thankful for your Word and so thankful for you who are revealed in this precious word. We rejoice in the opportunity tonight to be together and to think about things pertaining to the church and to our, our mission in this world, to be salt and light, to represent your truth, to preach your Gospel, to evangelize and disciple.

# GRACE CHURCH



*Grace*

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We ask that you would help us to learn tonight, to maybe be awakened to some things we need to see. But also be greatly encouraged about what you're doing here and what you're doing in other faithful churches as well. Let us partner with them and join with them to bring about, if it be your will, a modern reformation, and a modern revival. All of this we pray to the end of your glory, and we ask all this in Jesus' name. Amen.

All right, so I want to begin, I'm going to be talking a lot that kinda going, reviewing some things. And I think it's most appropriate that we take our Bibles in hand first and go to Psalm 145. Psalm 145. Just to get the greatness of our God before us and to put in, right in front of us what it is that we're arguing for when we think about the need for a modern reformation. It's to recover the truth about God and advocate for practicing theology in the church.

Psalm 145 is a song of praise, a psalm of David. "I will extol you, my God and king, and bless your name forever and ever. Every day I will bless you and praise your name forever and ever." Just stopping there. "To praise your name," when we talk

about the name of God, we're talking about all that that name represents, all that is packed into that name. So all the truth, all the theology that we're learning packed into that name. So when we praise the name of God, we're not just saying, God, or even, Yahweh. We are praising God for who he is. It's, our intellects are engaged to understand and know the God of whom we speak, the God that we praise.

So, "Every day I'll bless you, praise your name forever and ever. Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised in his greatness is unsearchable. One generation shall commend your works to another, and shall declare your mighty acts. On the glorious splendor of your majesty, and on your wondrous works, I will meditate. They shall speak of the might of your awesome deeds, and I will declare your greatness. They shall pour forth the fame of your abundant goodness and shall sing aloud of your righteousness.

"The Lord is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. The Lord is good to all, and his mercy is over all that he has made. All your works shall give thanks to

you, O Lord, and all your saints shall bless you! They shall speak of the glory of your kingdom, tell of your power, to make known to the children of man your mighty deeds, and the glorious splendor of your kingdom. Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and your dominion endures throughout all generations.

"The Lord's faithful in all his words and kind in all his works. The Lord upholds all who are falling and raises up all who are bowed down. The eyes of all look to you, and you give them their food in due season. You open your hand; you satisfy the desire of every living thing. The Lord is righteous in all his ways and kind in all his works. The Lord is near to all who call upon him, to all who call on him in truth. He fulfills the desire of those who fear him; he also hears their cry and saves them. The Lord preserves all who love him, but all the wicked he will destroy. My mouth will speak the praise of the Lord, and let all flesh bless his holy name forever and ever."

That magnificent psalm, that's, that is why we're here. That is, that is our birthright as the church, is to praise our God and his name forever and ever. As we think about our birthright, our

heritage, our privilege as Christians, when we look around at a lot of what passes for evangelicalism, what professes to be evangelical, evangelical churches, we find a great drift from what is the sentiment, the heart of the psalmist there in Psalm 145. A huge drift.

And I just thought that I would enter into tonight's topic by giving a brief word of personal, personal testimony. I grew up in a Christian home and I was raised by faithful Christian parents, but I was not a Christian until God saved me in about, in my twentieth year, before I turned 20. My growing up years were in the 1970s and 1980s. I was living and playing in suburbia with all of its money and fun and allurements.

And so the youth group that I grew up in and attended was facing the serious, very serious challenge of trying to attract well-entertained teenagers like me. And trying to gain and keep our interest, which is very difficult to do. Hoping that some of us would become, as they always put it back then, sold out for Jesus. In my life and the lives of many of those teenagers, the world and what it offered won out over the church. It was far

more attractive and far more alluring and had a far stronger appeal, tapping into my unregenerate heart than anything the church could offer.

I wanted to have fun and the world, and all its potential was on offer, and I hoped to find fame, fortune, significance, satisfaction, whatever it is, in, in joining the military and going on those missions and fulfilling those achievements. It was a surprising grace of God that visited me early in my military service. I became a Christian early on in my time in the military.

And very soon after my conversion, I began to notice how much of what I had enjoyed as a non-Christian, what it allured and enticed me as an unbeliever, while it still tempted me, I could tell that all the gifts and the offerings of the modern world that I grew up in, they were very, they were very powerful, very influential, but I could see them as something I need to make war with, something I need to oppose.

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In my early months a, as a Christian, I loved going to church. I loved hearing the Scripture preached, read, sung. I loved being with fellow-believers. I, I listened out for whatever comported with my Bible reading. Things like the holiness of God and the seriousness of sin, the need to repent of it, the holiness of God's people, the need to aspire to live a holy life, all that my activity about evangelizing the lost and following Christ in obedience. These are things I listened out for in the preaching from the pulpit. And whenever I heard those themes come out, my heart lifted.

I had to find them, honestly, through many of the stories that were being told, many of the anecdotes that were delivered. The preachers, what he did in the past week or whatever, that I kind of let that go by, but I was looking for those things that comported what I read in Scripture. At the time, as a brand-new Christian, I am still sorely tempted by the world and still tempted to live for myself.

And as I was in that church for a number of months before I was deployed, I found out that there were other professing

Christians in that church that were struggling with those things, as well, especially in my age group. But none of them were talking about it. The longer I was around these professing, church-going young Christians, the more I could see that the God-talk and the external righteousness was somewhat of a façade, just a veneer of spiritually.

In reality, many of these young people were living for the world, loving the world. And except for attending church on Sundays and maybe some youth events or student ministries' events, they were busy during the week fulfilling all the same desires and pursuing the same ambitions and living by the same priorities as pretty much everybody else. They could quote Bible verses, very good ones, too. They, the verses they quoted seemed to have really no effect on their desires, no effect, no ability to shape or control them. They held no sway over their wills, over their ambitions and behaviors.

So these, these people that I was around in the church, very, you know, from reputation, a very healthy church, well-known church. These people talked about God. They quoted the Bible.





They expressed a desire for holiness, but it's very difficult to see how they were really taking any of that seriously.

So God took me away from that environment for a time as I deployed to the, to the first Gulf War. During that deployment, I was immersed in Scripture. I was devouring the truth and studying Romans and Ephesians and Acts. And I read the Bible from cover to cover for the very first time in my life. And when I returned from the Gulf War and went back to my church, things had gotten a lot worse there. And as I reflect on it, actually, nothing had changed at that church, it's just I had changed.

And I came back into it and just saw more. It seemed that all of a sudden, the things I was, I was saying to them in my understanding of Scripture, the things that I was, the truths that I was rejoicing in out loud in their presence. The doctrines that I was so grateful for. I began to be rebuked by other Christians for what I was saying, suspected for making people feel uncomfortable. Talking about such things as sin and holiness and righteousness and all the rest.

When I got out of the military and returned home to attend the church I was raised in here in Colorado, the rebukes became more stern. And the level of suspicion became more grave and more, people were more concerned. Some of the, some of the older Christians, the leaders, thought I needed some pretty serious reprogramming.

For example, there were professing Christians who became upset when I spoke about the sovereignty of God. And particularly when speaking about the sovereignty of God in electing a people for himself, choosing them for salvation. That made people really angry. I didn't understand. It was a freeing doctrine to me. I rejoiced in it because I could see clearly in what Romans 1 through 3 said about myself. You're a sinner, Travis. You're dead in sin. There's no way you could elevate yourself to turn one eye upward toward God. I was like, that's me. That's clear. It's going to take something great, some miraculous power beyond me.

And I read in Romans, of course, it's the electing grace of God. He takes the initiative. He's sovereign. I rejoiced in that.

Many of the Christians around me were angry about that doctrine. That was disappointing to me. Growing up in church, that church, and coming back to it, and now as a Christian. Several people tried to abuse, disabuse me of the notion that God created the world in six literal days because, duh, science has disproven that. Get on board with science.

Everyone seemed to be really, really alarmed that I saw the Holy Spirit working in and through the Word as a sufficient, as all sufficient to help us repent of sin and to actually change with no help whatsoever from psychology. Many people called me naïve and simplistic to think that Christ would grow his church according to his will and his timing simply by teaching the Scripture and teaching its theology, shepherding people toward holy living, confronting sin, dealing with sin.

They pointed, instead, to models in emerging mega churches like Willow Creek and Saddleback as the, really the new models for church growth. Follow corporate models for business growth, do brand recognition and all the rest and you have instant success. All these new ways were about appealing to a nation of

consumers, to attract unchurched Harry and Mary, go after the young urban professionals who were tired of traditional church.

So the method is you go into the suburban, nobody did this in the rural areas. Nobody did this in, you know, really poverty-stricken areas. They went to suburbia. They went to where the wealth is and they sent surveys throughout these neighborhoods to find out what makes these yuppies feel comfortable, entice them with late-show style music programs, slick graphics, video presentations and deliver sermons in a non-preachy tone.

I was in the early-mid nineties just absolutely perplexed by all this. I, I couldn't figure out what is going, what is the disconnect that I, that is between my Bible and what I'm seeing all around me. Why is it that I seemed to be, everywhere I go, I seem to be the odd man out? Professing Christians, many of them older, seemingly wiser than me purported pillars of the church, some were pastors and seminary professors. All them alike seemed to be in one or several ways giving the world way too much credit as if the world had something that we needed in the church. That we needed to take it and deploy it for church

growth or human health or human, you know, discipleship or whatever.

They give the world way too much credit. And they still claimed, all the while, they still claimed to believe in an inerrant, authoritative, and sufficient Word of God. They preached it in the pulpit. They taught it in classes. But the way they lived their lives, the way they evangelized and disciplined, the way they actually tried to work on growing the church, all of that was following the world's script.

And so that sent me off on a pursuit of trying to figure out what was happening. Was I nuts? And, actually, it was such a joy and relief to find, discover John MacArthur on the radio.

Because as I listened to him, I thought, well, there's somebody who 's, I can understand. There's somebody who's making sense. They're actually explaining the Bible just simply going verse by verse. Slowly, but surely through John MacArthur I found other avenues of, R.C. Sproul and other teachers.

I started to discover other books. I realized I'm not the only one thinking this. Or else, all of them are crazy just like I am so I'm in good company. I wanted to understand though why I would look down to read my Bible, which seemed so plain, so clear, so simple, so straight forward, and then I would look up to see all the methodologies of the world, things I'd been hearing in college and university classes, things I'd been seeing in the business world or marketing, all of it brought into the church, practiced in the church and then affirmed as wise and sophisticated and God-approved.

So I started reading books. I asked a lot of questions. I irritated a lot of people with my questions. I searched for answers. And eventually the Lord led me to the right books, then to the really old books where I found comradery. He led me to the right teachers and helped me to start making sense of all this.

Unbeknownst to me at that time, at the same time I was experiencing, personally experiencing all this confusion in the church, David Wells published a very important and as it turns

out, a highly influential book called *No Place for Truth*. *No Place for Truth*, it was published in 1993. It's a first in a series of four books. I've got them here if you'd like to take a look at them after the, our time tonight.

But *No Place for Truth*. *God in the Wasteland* is the second book. *Losing Our Virtue* is the third book and *Above All Earthly Powers* is the fourth book. They're fantastic books. I actually have, you guys don't need to pass out just yet, but this little booklet of David Wells because that's four books that look like that. And that's pretty intimidating for you. But if you just take them one at a time, it's only that thick. I mean that's an inch. That's not a big deal.

And so I just thought I'd whet your appetite with a little David Wells by giving out one of these. This is, look how thin that is. Just a little pamphlet. It's 16 pages. And the numbering starts at page three. So you're already ahead just when you get to the first page. But I want to give you guys, just one per family or something like that, whatever we can give away. I've got a stack, a couple stacks of them.

But it's called *The Bleeding of the Evangelical Church*. This is written in 1995. So it would have been after he wrote this book and this book, but before the other two. And you just get a, get a taste of how he communicates. In fact, I actually quoted out of this in this morning's sermon. But the subtitle of this first book, *No Place for Truth*, is, it helped me at the time to crystalize what was at the heart of the issue. And the subtitle of *No Place for Truth* is *Whatever Happened to Evangelical Theology?*

What a good question. Whatever happened to evangelical theology? I'd been a Christian for ten years before I finally found a church that really rejoiced in evangelical theology. It was disappointing to have to wait so long. But I was so thankful when I go there. *No Place for Truth* is a book that really indicted the evangelical church for abandoning its historical theological roots to become, instead, to become worldly, to become pragmatic, to chase outward success rather than inward faithfulness to God and his Word.



As I said, Wells followed up that book in 1994 with *God in the Wasteland*. That developed further the, the, the argument that he was making in the first book, this, about this process of secularization in the church through the influence of modernity. I don't want to get too bogged down. I've mentioned in different venues in our church as we've taught over the past number of years, this issue of modernity and modernization and secularization. And I don't want to get bogged down by unpacking the elements of that and getting kind of into the weeds.

But I do want to read one paragraph for you from *God in the Wasteland* just to summarize David Wells' concern with, with what he sees in modernity. So *God in the Wasteland*. He says this, "Modernity," basically think modernity, think about all the technology and the communications technology and, and transportation developments that have happened in the past 100 years. And, you know, information technology started with the television and radio, television, airwaves, but then it's internet, it's phones, it's, I mean all this stuff has happened so quickly, so rapidly to just immerse our minds and take them away and modernize us. Which means, secularize us, make us think in secular categories about the world.

So Wells says this, "Modernity presents an interlocking system of values that has invaded and settled within the psyche of every person. Modernity is simply unprecedented in its power to remake human appetites, thinking processes, and values. It is, to put it in biblical terms, the worldliness of our time. For worldliness is that system of values and beliefs and behaviors and expectations in any given culture that have at their center the fallen human being and that relegate to their periphery any thought about God.

"Worldliness is what makes sin look normal in any age and righteousness seem odd. Modernity is worldliness and it has concealed its values so adroitly in the abundance, the comfort, and the wizardry of our age that even those who call themselves the people of God seldom recognize them for what they are." End quote.

The result of this process of modernity, modernization is to secularize the church. Modernity makes no overtly hostile attacks on the holiness of God and Christ and his church, which

does happen. And we see that coming out of the new, new atheist movement and some of those corners of the internet. But modernity is far more subtle in its attacks and its influence. Instead of denying God outright, modernity makes him appear irrelevant, by taking all the things that we need and, in pre-modern times used to pray for, and making them abundantly available on the shelf of your local store.

How often do you pray, "Give me, Father, please, this day my daily bread," and you're talking about food? How often do you do that? When you run out of bread in the refrigerator, don't you just go to the store? Or these days, order online and have it brought to you? So modernity, it's subtle. It doesn't deny God outright. It, it makes God seem irrelevant, weightless.

Instead of attacking the truth of Scripture, modernity makes Scripture appear quaint, outmoded, outdated. The modern world has really succeeded in choking out the transcendent to only make space for the worship of, of a false God made in its own image and its own likeness. And I've given, I've assigned that, I don't think I'm original to do this, but I've assigned that

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God the name, progress. That, that's the God of modernity is the God of progress. We always, I mean, who wants an old iPhone anymore?

So we're always looking ahead to how science is going to fix this ailment or that ailment or how the vaccine is going to do it for us. And then transportation, hey, I know we're running out of oil and so we're going to get electric and then we'll do energy through hydro-electric. It's, you know, so we've always got a solution. We're always looking to the future. Progress is going to solve it for us.

So the modern world has choked out the transcendent. It's, it's, it's taken our eyes from up and brought them back down to the earth so that we look at ourselves and we see a god made in our own image and our own likeness. And now having, for many, having surrendered to the modern, modernization and the secularization of the world in every other sphere of life. Many professing Christians have brought that same sense of defeat back into the local church, acting as if the church needs to surrender to this

program as well, adopt these powerful forces and repurpose them for church purposes, for God's purposes.

So ever since their surrender, today's professing evangelicals have been building the church in the likeness of the modern world. And most have failed to stop and assess. Most have failed to expose the worldly assumptions of the, that they've embraced. Evangelicalism has been very, very busy. It's been very, very active. It seems to be very large and successful. But it's been building worldly churches, worldly institutions. Parachurches, seminaries, colleges, worldly institutions and trying to reshape God in the image of modernism.

So it's, it's time for us, as Christians, to repent and return to our first love.}} I started reading these books nearly 20 years ago and they have made a profound impact on my life and my thinking. At the time they were published, there were other men, again, unbeknownst to me, but other men reading them, too, evangelical leaders who had made the same observations, who had developed the same deep concerns about what they were seeing in their in churches around them and evangelicalism as a, as a

movement. And they'd come to the same conclusions as David Wells had.

John MacArthur is one of them. He wrote this book, *Ashamed of the Gospel*. It's, I'm not sure if it's still in print or being distributed, but I think you can get some from *Grace to You*. But someone who come up to me after and says, "I got to have that book," I'll give this one to you because this is a second copy. Okay. So do that. I just want you to come up and get books. You can't have these books, though. These are all written in. It's got my scribbles. So you've got to get your own, but I'll point you in the right direction.

But John MacArthur makes the same case. I think he interacted with David Wells, as well, in that book. But he makes the same case, seeing that pragmatism and that worldliness and all that entering into church growth strategies, and he titled it *Ashamed of the Gospel, When the Church Becomes Like the World*. Its exactly the same point.

Other church leaders led by James Montgomery Boice and Michael Horton, both of those men were deeply influenced by David Wells' books. They gathered together some other likeminded evangelical leaders around them to form the Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals. The Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals, they still have a website. They still have lots of good content there. That, that alliance formed in 1995.

They drafted and published a statement that's known as the *Cambridge Declaration* in 1996. And you'll find that *Cambridge Declaration* posted on our church website so you can, you can go there, and copy/paste download it for yourself. And I highly recommend that you read that, that you read that. But I want to read you the introductory , introductory paragraphs to that *Cambridge Declaration*.

"In the course of history words change. In our day this has happened to the word Evangelical." Now keep in mind, this is in 1996. I've spotted some of you out there who were not born when this statement came out and yet it sounds as fresh and relevant today as when it was written 25 years ago.

"In the course of history words change. In our day this has happened to the word Evangelical. In the past it served as a bond of unity between Christians from a wide diversity of church traditions. Historic evangelicalism was confessional. It embraced the essential truths of Christianity as those were defined by," the, "the great ecumenical councils of the church. In addition, evangelicals also shared a common heritage in the Solas of the sixteenth century Protestant Reformation.

"Today the light of the Reformation has been significantly dimmed. The," consequent, "consequences," is, "that the word Evangelical has become so inclusive as to have lost its meaning. We face the peril of losing the unity it has taken centuries to achieve. Because of this crisis and because of our love for Christ, his Gospel, and his church, we endeavor to assert anew our commitment to the central truths of the Reformation and a historic evangelicalism. These truths we affirm not because of their role in our traditions, but because we believe that they are central to the Bible."



We summarize that in what we've been saying in another way. We can just say this, that evangelical church has become worldly. It has succumbed to worldliness and by worldliness, we're not primarily referring to the sins that were decried once by the fundamentalists, like drinking smoking, various forms of sexual immorality, all that stuff. The evangelical church has become worldly in another way, maybe more deeply and more subtle by embracing the thinking and the practices of the world.

Now that evangelicalism has, for the most part, been overtaken by this worldliness of our time, which takes the shape of modernity, which has bowed to the powerful processes of secularization. David Wells puts it this way, *God in the Wasteland*, he says, "The fundamental problem in the evangelical," world, "world today is not inadequate technique, insufficient organization or antiquated music. And those who want to squander the church's resources bandaging these scratches will do nothing to staunch the flow of blood that's spilling from its true wounds.

"The fundamental problem in the evangelical world today is that God rests too inconsequentially upon the church." That is a, that is a million-dollar statement. "God rests too inconsequentially upon the church. His truth is too distant. His grace is too ordinary. His judgment is too benign. His Gospel is too easy. And his Christ is too common." End Quote.

In *No Place for Truth*, David Wells laments what he had been observing for over 25 years, from 1970 to 1995. He's been observing, over that time period, the effectiveness of modernity in overtaking and insinuating itself into the church. He says, I, I, quote, "I watched with growing disbelief as the evangelical church has cheerfully plunged into astounding theological illiteracy." End Quote.

Later he writes this, "There can be little doubt that if the capacity to think Christianly about this world is eroding in the churches, so, too, will the propriety of doing theology, both in the pulpit and in the academy. The propriety of this kind of knowledge will disintegrate as certainly as would the propriety of a novelist continuing to work when it was discovered that the

culture in which he or she was living had gradually lost the ability to read.” End Quote.

I umm, sometimes I’m concerned when I see Christians, when I say, turn to whatever Scripture, and they pull out their phone and they scroll to find it. I think we’re becoming more and more of a visually oriented culture. We’re even, I mean they just, my latest iPhone update wants to give me an update to give me gender whatever emoticons, and, you know, emojis and all that stuff, and showing, you know, like two women together and two men together. And I can send that as an emoji, it’s like.

But my point isn’t to criticize that, though, I, we should criticize that. But the point is to say that more and more, my, when you open up those emoticon things, it’s just a, you can scroll pages and pages of emoticons. People are communicating now more and more with visual images and pictures and people . It’s becoming more and more of a visual society.

So what happens when people lose the desire to read? What happens when they are intimidated by picking up a book? When,

because they've been doing what I call Google reading, you know, scanning the page and grabbing your key words and then kind of move, find that for the paper that you're writing, stick it in there and then kind of move on. That's called Google reading. Students, you know what I'm saying, right?

What happens when that becomes the pattern of your thinking? It's so hard to break that pattern and get into what one author calls deep reading. We need to get into deep reading. Our souls depend on it.

James Boice, making the same, by the way James Boice is in heaven. He died in the year 2000. But he made the same observations over the same time period as David Wells. And reflecting from his vantage point on Wells' question, "Whatever happened to evangelical theology?" Boice proffers an answer.

He says, "That evangelicals have pursued the world's wisdom. They've embraced the world's theology. They've followed the world's agenda and they've employed the world's methods. So they've pursued the world's wisdom, embraced the world's

theology, followed the world's agenda, and employed the world's methods." I'll walk through each of those things just ever so briefly.

But first Boice says the evangelical church has been guilty of following the world's wisdom. We've kind of become like, like Israel that pined after the Canaanites, always looking down the hill, always looking at those Canaanite cities and how cool everything seemed there over at the beach. So they wanted to go down to the Philistine areas and kind of be like them. They said to Samuel, "Give us a king like the other nations around us," rejecting God as their king.

And the church has become like that seeming to feel this constant yearning for the world's approval and the world's acceptance. So though we profess to hold the Bible as inerrant, authoritative, all-sufficient Word of the living God, the church has repeatedly turned away from listening to God's wisdom to listen to the world's wisdom. And in doing that, the church has nullified God's Word, not by attacking it, but just by setting

it aside. Not by denying it, but by treating it as insufficient. In spite of what the church has professed.

One way this happens is when professing Christians dabble in or maybe embrace wholly and uncritically the study of psychology and psychiatry and does whatever the medical professional prescribe even, even if it comes from a worldview that marginalizes and denies God. That's where psychology came from, by the way, through the Renaissance Enlightenment thinking that said, "There is no God. There is no supernatural reality. There is no immaterial part of man. Everything is atoms. Everything is material."

And yet, their left with humans and their problems. Aren't they? They still have crime to deal with. They still have aberrant thinking and aberrant behavior. And so what do they do? Psychologists and psychiatrists find a, a reason for existence, don't they? But they're treating the problem with, with none of the tools necessary to treat the problem. The problem is a spiritual problem, which they've denied. The problem is sin before a holy God, both of which they've denied.

And so they attack the problem with worldly means, worldly methods. When they can't actually solve the situation through psychology and talk therapy and all the rest, they resort to drugs. That's where the psychiatrists come in.

Another way is how many churches utilized corporate marketing techniques, entertainment, all that to attract unbelievers and grow the church. They want those people coming through the door to think their church is cool, relevant, with it, hip. All of that is just the world's wisdom, wanting to be accepted and approved by the world and so they succumb to the world's wisdom.

A second way evangelicals have been guilty of following the worlds , becoming worldly is in , in following the world's theology. And even more today we see this in the, the churches following after this Woke-Social Justice movement. So we use biblical terms like sin and salvation. But many churches have gutted those terms of their biblical meanings and adopted worldly meanings for those same terms.



We claim the Bible tells us the way of salvation. But we come to the Bible wearing worldly lenses that really distort the real meaning of Scripture. We inject worldly meanings into biblical terms. So instead of using the Bible's terms and words that God revealed and wrote in Scripture, we adopt the world's language, which comes from the godless halls of the university.

Many evangelicals are using the language of social liberation, all that nasty offspring of Marxist ideas. For many years, Christians have been using therapeutic language to speak about the human condition, sin is dysfunction, brokenness. Salvation is wholeness. It's a sense of well-being via therapy. Dr. Boice says the Bible becomes our self-help manual. Its stories are entertaining moral tales showing us how to cope with our problems.

So many people still in the church especially still use sin, salvation, but by that they mean salvation means wholeness. It means well-being. It means peace of soul, peace of mind. Sin means something's not quite right with me. I'm, I'm ill at ease.



But they don't think of sin in terms of the violating, transgressing God's law.

So third, following the world's wisdom, learning the world's theology, evangelicals have been guilty of following the world's agenda. We claim our priorities are set by Scripture. That is evangelism, discipleship, but we've got to ask, do your calendars and checkbooks reflect those priorities? The world often intrudes because it's always asserting the priority of its own agenda.

So today's agenda, agenda de jour, racism, woke-ism, social justice, intersectionality. We've been seeing that crammed down our throats. We've also seen climate change, world hunger, green technology, poverty, housing inequities. So by listening to the world, when the church listens to all that stuff and digests it, it's in danger of becoming the servant of the world. Saying that it's our job to see that through, to do it God's way and pursue all those Godless agendas.

So finally, having followed the world's wisdom, learned its theology, serving its agenda, the evangelical church has been guilty of employing the world's methods. We claim as evangelicals to trust in God to save and build and guide and direct by the Spirit of Christ, but we've resorted to worldly methods of attracting people to build the church.

Evangelicals have embraced pragmatism as a suitable method to build churches. Do whatever works. Church leaders have become marketers. They conduct surveys. They build brands. They've become accountants. They count everything: money, people, website hits, visits, all that stuff. They, they're fixated on money. They're attracting people through entertainment. They soft pedal the harder truths of the Gospel: sin and judgment. And they keep the people in the seats by entertainment and therapy.

So all of this sounds so encouraging to us tonight , doesn't it? No, it's not. It's rather discouraging, isn't it? But this has been happening for the past 50 years. It's been going on for half a century. And it's, it's important that we as a church are

really aware of this, really aware of our recent history that is weakened so many of our evangelical institutions and so many formerly faithful churches.

It is important that we do not proceed on the task of doing theology together as a church, that we don't proceed with without any awareness of this history because it affects everybody that we run into. So what's to be done about it? What can we do? And this is the really, really encouraging part. We can repent. We can join in repenting and recovering an historic evangelical faith.

The opening statement in the *Cambridge Declaration* says this, "Evangelical churches today are increasingly dominated by the spirit of this age rather than by the Spirit of Christ." Okay, so we've just surveyed that just now. And then it says this, "As evangelicals, we call ourselves to repent of this sin and to recover the historic Christian faith."

It's encouraging. When we identify this departure from theology as sin, which it is, God has given us a book, he's told us,

study me. Study this book. Know it. Meditate on it. Make it your delight day and night, like Psalm 1 says. There's theology. There's truth about God and his name that we need to embrace and understand. And when we've set that aside, that's called sin.

So if we identify that as the sin that it is, that's encouraging because we can confess it as such. And then we can ask forgiveness and God can forgive us. And then we can work out repentance by recovering what we have set aside. Okay. So, there are some in this room who haven't grown up in all this, you know. They've become Christians without any understanding of this and so you just join in, not having any of the history. You just join in recovering the historic evangelical faith.

For those of us, though, who have grown up in it and you know what I'm talking about, who've been living through this for decades and wondering, what's, what's wrong, what's going on. Why this disconnect between what I read in my Bible and what I'm seeing in the churches. We can maybe ask some hard questions about ourselves and say, how have I neglected to study and

pursue and to think deeply and critically? What have I embraced?  
What have I accepted?

And to, to think through those things ourselves, but even as a church we could just say, okay, we don't want any of that old, moldy, last 50 years evangelicalism. We don't want that anymore. What we want is to return to that vibrant, historic evangelical faith that connects itself right back to the apostolic church, comes through the historic ecumenical statements, creeds, and confessions, right through the Protestant Reformation and its Solas and its doctrines of Grace. All that produced so much, and we are riding on and enjoying the privilege of, we can go back and recover that. And we can do that together as a church."

So this modern reformation, it really starts with us. It starts right here in our own church. We don't need to wait for anybody else to start it. Although, there are many, a number of good faithful churches who are moving in this direction, have been moving for a long time. But we can repent now, and we can strive to recover the high and holy privilege that Christ has secured for us by his life and death and resurrection.

He secured for us access to God. So we can study Scripture. We can study the theology of Scripture together that we might know and worship the living God. David said repeatedly in Psalm 119, here's verse 97, "O, how I love your law. It is my meditation all the day." He said this in Psalm 119:162 and following, "I rejoice at your word like one who finds great spoil. I hate and abhor falsehood," which is what modernity and secularization and everything that has insinuated into our churches.

So, "I hate and abhor that, but I love your law. Seven times a day, I praise you for your righteous rules. Great peace have those who love your law; nothing can make them stumble." What joy. There's joy in studying theology when we follow those first verses of Psalm 1. "Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers, but his delight is in," what? The law of God, right? "The law of the Lord and on his law, he meditates day and night."

# GRACE CHURCH



Grace

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So the more we saturate our minds with Scripture, the more our minds are renewed, the more we're going to think differently. The more we're going to think critically. Or as Wells put it, the more we, we think Christianly about the world. Let's think Christianly together as a church.

So what we need to develop is a habit of suspicion about the world we live in. We need to be developing a habit of suspicion about the world we live in, about the worldly people that we come into contact with. I don't, I don't say treat them like enemies. They're the mission field. But don't embrace or swallow their philosophies. Don't, don't, don't be enamored with their approval. Don't seek it. They need what you have; you don't need what they have. They need the approval of our God. They don't need, we don't need their approval.

So we need to develop a habit of suspicion about the world that we live in, the people who are teaching it, all its wisdom, its theology, its agendas, its methodologies. We can't trust it and we must think critically about it. We've got to be think, critical thinking Christians. We've got to be discerning

Christians. Whenever we detect our own compromise, or perhaps someone lovingly exposes compromise to us, we need to repent of that sin.

And the way we work out our repentance is in a continual habitual lifelong pursuit, a striving, if you will, to recover the historical evangelical faith in our own church, in our own place, in our own time. And work to see that spread in our own region. So how do we do that? By honoring the Scripture. By honoring God's Word as God's Word, for what it is, the holy revealed written Word of God.

We do that by studying its doctrines, learning from the historic ecumenical creeds, the Protestant Reformation confessions, and by proclaiming this, by broadcasting it, by telling everybody about it. That's how we do that. That's how we honor the word of God. In the *Cambridge Declaration, Declaration*, under the heading *Sola Scriptura*, it begins to address the problem that we're pointing to, pointing to the erosion of biblical authority in, in much of what we call evangelism.



Evangelicals still claim to be people of the book, biblical Christians. Many of them will still affirm the inerrancy of Scripture, but in practice, as we're saying, in practice, the authority of Scripture has faded. It, God's Word rests lightly on their consciences, if at all. They just really, it's like back in the book of the Judges. Every man doing what's right in his own eyes.

I see this all the time. It's very sad. And so many are practicing, no longer practicing what they say they believe. They still belong to the church; they still affirm the church's doctrinal statements. They say, yeah, I believe that. That's totally what I believe. But then you see that they practice something completely different.

So here's what the *Cambridge Declaration* says about Scripture. "Scripture alone is the inerrant rule of the church's life. But the evangelical church today has separated Scripture from its authoritative function. In practice, the church is guided far too often by the culture. Therapeutic technique, marketing strategies and the beat of the world, of the entertainment

world, often have far more to say what the church wants, how it functions and what it offers than does the Word of God.

"Pastors have neglected their rightful oversight of worship, including the doctrinal content of the music." Thank you, Ren Merry, for overseeing the, or taking very close look at the doctrinal content of our music. "As biblical authority has been abandoned in practice, as its," truth, "truths have faded from Christian," conscious, "consciousness, and as its doctrines have lost their saliency, the church has been increasingly emptied of its integrity, moral authority and direction.

"Rather than adapting Christian faith to satisfy the felt needs of consumers, we must proclaim the law as the only measure of true righteousness and the Gospel as the only," saving announcement, or the only, "announcement of saving truth. Biblical truth is indispensable to the church's understanding, nurture, and discipline. Scripture must take us beyond our perceived needs to our real needs and liberate us from seeing ourselves through seductive images, clichés promises and priorities of mass culture.

"It is only in the light of God's truth that we understand ourselves aright and see God's provision for our need. The Bible, therefore, must be taught and preached in the church. Sermons must be expositions of the Bible and its teachings, not expressions of the preachers' opinions of the ideas of the age. We must settle for nothing less than what God has given. The work of the Holy Spirit in personal experience cannot be disengaged from Scripture. The Spirit does not speak in ways that are independent of Scripture. Apart from Scripture we would have never have known of God's grace in Christ. The Biblical Word, rather than spiritual experience is the test of truth."

End quote.

Folks, when we give ourselves to honoring God's Word, God will lift us up. He honors those who honor his Word. Try, see if I can find this quote. Chuck, Chuck actually pointed this out to me, and I want to see if I can find this and read it to you. Yeah, so here's what it says. "So to be the church in this way," as a reforming church, recovering the historical ecumenical, or evangelical faith. "To be the church in this way, the church is going to have to find in the coming generation leaders who

exemplify this hope for its future and who will devote themselves to seeing it realized.

"To lead the church in the way that it needs to be led, they will have to rise above the internal politics of the evangelical world and refuse to," ex, "accept the status quo where that no longer serves the vital interests of the kingdom of God. They will have to decline to spend themselves in the building of their own private kingdoms and refuse to be intimidated into giving the church less and other than what it needs.

"Instead, they will have to begin to build afresh, in cogently biblical ways among the decaying structures that now clutter the evangelical landscape. To succeed, they will have to be people of large vision, people of courage, people who have learned again what it means to live by the Word of God, and most importantly, what it means to live before the holy God of that Word. Can this happen? I believe it can, but not until these leaders have successfully accomplished two major projects. First, the church is," going to have to learn, "going to have to

learn how to detect worldliness and make a clear decision to be weaned from it."

And then skipping ahead, he says, "Second, the church is going to have to get much more serious about itself, cease to be a supermarket serving the needs of religious consumers and become instead a force of counter cultural spirituality that draws from the interconnected lives of its members as expressed through their love, service, worship, understanding and proclamation. That is a tall order for the tempo and organization of the modern world which exacts a heavy toll on all who attempt to keep pace with it, clearly mitigate against it happening."

But it can happen. When we give ourselves to honoring God and his Word by preaching and teaching his Word, like we were saying this morning, by hearing and obeying his Word, then we will develop a taste for theology. We'll develop a, there will be a growing longing in our hearts to know more and more deeply this God who has saved us.



Again, as David Wells says, "A God with whom we are on such easy terms and whose reality is little different from our own, a God who is merely there to satisfy our needs has no real authority to compel and will soon begin to bore us." Man, that's the God that I've heard preached for many years in many other churches. Our God, the God of Scripture, never bores. His holiness compels us to come and bow and worship.

So we need to reassert the transcendence of God, teach the incomparable holiness of God and that comes by the pursuit of studying theology so we can gain the knowledge of the holy, so that we can bow in adoring worship. We need to continue to identify and keep returning to drink from those two streams I mentioned that produce the evangelicalism that we, we've stand on the shoulders of. Those two streams, as I mentioned, are the ecumenical creeds of the early church and the Solas of the Protestant Reformation.

We 'll unpack some of those things later on. But I wanted to close there with the need to recover the Word of God in our pulpits, in our thinking, in our conversation, really in our



hearts, our hearts' meditation. So next time when we come back, as long as I don't insert another introductory thing in there, I probably won't. but we'll get into revelation. We'll start with general revelation and then talk about special revelation. So general revelation in what God created, and then special revelation in the Word God revealed in spoken and written word and then the word of Christ.