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EQUIPPING MEMBERS OF WASHINGTON BAPTIST  
CHURCH IN DILLSBORO, INDIANA, WITH THE  
FOUNDATIONS OF CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE

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A Project  
Presented to  
the Faculty of  
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

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In Partial Fulfillment  
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Doctor of Ministry

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by  
Brian Timothy Dempsey  
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**APPROVAL SHEET**

EQUIPPING MEMBERS OF WASHINGTON BAPTIST  
CHURCH IN DILLSBORO, INDIANA, WITH THE  
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Brian Timothy Dempsey

Read and Approved by:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Michael E. Pohlman (Faculty Supervisor)

\_\_\_\_\_  
T. J. Betts

Date \_\_\_\_\_

This project is dedicated to my precious and incredible family.

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## PREFACE

This project has only been completed by the grace of God. Many people have provided encouragement while acting as conduits of God's grace in my life.

First, I thank God for my family. To my wife, Karen: you have been an incredible encouragement and support through this process. I can't thank you enough for your willingness to take on the extra burdens that a process like this involves. To our kids, Ian, Olivia, and Carson: thank you for understanding all the times Daddy had to be away at school and all the hours I had to spend studying and working. I will never forget your amazement the first time you walked onto Southern Seminary's campus and understood that "Daddy is going to school here." I love you all dearly.

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Finally, I would like to thank Dr. Michael Pohlman for serving as my supervisor. Thank you for the many hours spent reviewing and giving feedback on the content of this manuscript. Your help was invaluable.

Brian Dempsey

North East, Maryland

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

The New Testament gives numerous warnings about false teachers and teaching. In fact, it is impossible to escape such warnings as one reads through the New Testament. Few things can disrupt the spiritual growth of a church like subtle error. Today's religious atmosphere is no different. One only has to turn on a religious television network or walk down the aisles of a Christian bookstore, and the message is clear: "Live *Your Best Life Now!*"<sup>1</sup> Another title calls for readers to *Change Your Words, Change Your Life.*<sup>2</sup> Others claim that *You're Supposed to Be Wealthy.*<sup>3</sup> And this is only one form of doctrinal deviance. Because of the influence of false teaching and doctrinal compromise in so many churches, it is vitally important that believers be trained in foundational doctrines and be equipped to separate biblical truth from error. A ministry project toward this end has greatly benefited the local flock at Washington Baptist Church.

#### **Context**

This ministry project took place in the context of Washington Baptist Church (WBC) in Dillsboro, Indiana. Dillsboro is a rural farming community that has a background of cultural Christianity. Many people in the area are members of churches

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<sup>1</sup>Joel Osteen, *Your Best Life Now: 7 Steps to Living at Your Full Potential* (New York: Warner Books, 2004).

<sup>2</sup>Joyce Meyer, *Change Your Words, Change Your Life* (New York: Warner Books, 2012).

<sup>3</sup>Creflo Dollar, *You're Supposed to be Wealthy: How to Make Money, Live Comfortably, and Build an Inheritance for Future Generations* (New York: Warner Books, 2015).

and attended Sunday school and church as children. As a result, many among the population possess a basic understanding of the Bible and Christian teaching. However, a growing part of the population is openly antagonistic to the gospel and to the exclusive claims of Christianity. The biblical insistence on absolute truth and a God who will judge based on his standard of righteousness are less and less tolerable. So while religious belief is generally accepted, it exists at a very shallow and cultural level. Determining what percentage of professing Christians in the area are truly born again is very challenging. As a result, personal evangelism can be difficult.

Life in the communities surrounding Dillsboro is fairly simple, and the people are generally very hard working and blue collar. They want to be seen as earning their income through legitimate means. However, some long for more than they can ever hope to earn given their educational standing and the types of jobs available to them. This longing opens the door for prosperity gospel teachings that promise wealth through legitimate and even respectable means. Many people know enough to reject blatant prosperity theology, but more subtle influences exist. These are the teachers who contribute to their “self-image” and have a strong influence on their view of God and Christianity. The theological development of Christians in this community has been weakened by these influences.

False teaching has emerged within the body of WBC on several occasions, mainly in the form of “get rich” prosperity schemes and the influence of prosperity teachers and preachers. Two examples will illustrate. On multiple occasions, a member of the congregation has mentioned how much of a positive influence either Joel Osteen or Joyce Meyer has been on his life. The individual had little to no understanding of the major theological differences between those teachers and evangelical Christianity. A second example involves multi-level marketing. While there is nothing innately sinful about organizations that are structured in a “multi-level” format, one has drawn in several church members by couching its mission in spiritual terms. These members have been

convinced that it is God’s will for them to be millionaires and to spend their lives recruiting others to their “team” in the pursuit of that goal. The organization uses Christian language and even some Christian teachers but demonstrates a shallow understanding of sanctification and the Christian life in general. Believers must be taught the basic doctrines that are the heart of biblical Christianity, so they might better identify and answer the claims made by those who do not hold to them.

The greatest challenge to equipping members of WBC is time. WBC has a small, faithful core, but the people are busy. Washington is a traditional church that still has a schedule of Sunday school, Sunday morning and Sunday evening services, with small groups on Wednesday night. Many within the church are either too elderly to attend every service or have other obligations that make attendance at all services difficult. The best attended and most viable option for genuinely equipping a maximum portion of the congregation is the Sunday morning worship time.

In summary, the subtle influences of bad theology have entered in to Washington Baptist Church. Christians will reach theological health when they are grounded in the foundational doctrines of the Christian faith and can identify teachings that run contrary to them. The people of WBC must be firmly anchored in the Word of God and Christian doctrine, which will allow them to biblically identify and refute false teachings.

### **Rationale**

The biblical standard for training Christians in the faith is comprehensive. “Teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you” (Matt 28:20).<sup>4</sup> The ability to discern false doctrine and to teach sound doctrine is one that must be possessed by the pastor (Titus 1:9), and the end result is clearly given: “always being prepared to make a

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<sup>4</sup>Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are from the English Standard Version (ESV).

defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you” (1 Pet 3:15). This ability to discern is a vitally important part of the Christian life because Scripture warns that false teachers will arise who do “not agree with the sound words of our Lord Jesus Christ and the teaching that accords with godliness” (1 Tim 6:3).

Many professing Christians have fallen prey to false teachings and bad doctrine, and the area surrounding WBC is no different. Several apostolic churches have been planted in the immediate area (charismatic churches that believe that there are modern day apostles), and Joel Osteen and Joyce Meyer are watched and read frequently, including by some within the church. Believers must be equipped to be discerning in the area of doctrine.

Because of the ministry context, the focus of this project was to develop a twenty-week sermon series that would introduce the members of WBC to the core doctrines of the faith. The series, delivered on Sunday mornings, dealt with the major doctrines of the faith in as much detail as time allowed, while placing emphasis on how the doctrines interrelate and how they impact the faith and sanctification of believers. Time was also spent comparing orthodox teaching with specific deviant forms, and application was made as to how deviant doctrines affect the faith of those holding them. For example, some Christians at WBC would know that prosperity theology is wrong but would not be able to explain in any detail why, or how it is antithetical to the sacrificial life to which Scripture calls believers. False teaching in turn affects how a person views God, and what people have a right to expect from him.

As members of WBC were exposed to the major doctrines of the faith and their practical ramifications, they were challenged to formulate a sound theological grid through which all teaching and preaching must pass. This teaching equipped them to be discerning in what they listen to and read and to help them understand why some issues can have only one orthodox position. When a key teaching is altered, the entire structure of doctrine and belief is affected, and a warped Christianity emerges.

## **Purpose**

The purpose of this project was to equip the members of Washington Baptist Church with the foundations of Christian doctrine for the health of the church and the advancement of the gospel.

## **Goals**

In order to best equip the members of Washington Baptist Church and to accomplish the purpose of this project, three goals were necessary. These goals reflect the steps that were taken in order to train the members of WBC in their understanding of core Christian doctrine.

1. The first goal of this project was to assess the current doctrinal knowledge of the membership of Washington Baptist Church.
2. The second goal was to develop a twenty-week sermon series on the core doctrines of the faith.
3. The third goal was to equip the members of WBC with the core doctrines upon which the church rests through the twenty-week sermon series.

Specific research methodology was used to measure when these goals had been accomplished. The methodology and instruments used to measure the success of each goal will be detailed in the next section.

## **Research Methodology**

The research methodology and assessment of this project included a pre-series survey, a post-series survey, and an evaluation rubric.<sup>5</sup> Three goals were used to determine the effectiveness of this project.

The first goal was to assess the current doctrinal knowledge of the membership of Washington Baptist Church. Prior to the beginning of the sermon series, a T-test for

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<sup>5</sup>All of the research instruments used in this project were performed in compliance with and approved by the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary Research Ethics Committee prior to use in the ministry project.

dependent samples<sup>6</sup> was given to twenty adult and teen members of the congregation.<sup>7</sup> Each participant was assigned a four-digit personal identification number (PIN) to be used in linking together the pre-and post-survey results. The survey consisted of various questions dealing with core doctrines of the church and how they differ from unorthodox but popular theology. This assessment gauged each participant's initial level of understanding concerning the core teachings of Scripture and how those core teachings differ from other popular belief systems. This goal was considered successfully met when twenty adult and teen members of WBC completed the survey and the results had been analyzed, yielding a clearer picture of the level of doctrinal understanding among WBC members at that time.

The second goal was to develop a twenty-week sermon series on the core doctrines of the faith. The sermon series was delivered in forty-minute messages during the Sunday morning worship service. This goal was measured by the leadership of WBC who used a rubric to evaluate the biblical faithfulness, clarity, and relevance of the sermon series. This goal was considered successfully met when a minimum of 90 percent of all the rubric evaluation indicators met or exceeded the sufficiency level.

The third goal was to equip the members of WBC with the core doctrines upon which the church rests through the twenty-week sermon series. This goal was measured by administering a post-survey that measured the dependent sample group's understanding and knowledge of the core teachings of Scripture. This survey was identical to the pre-survey. This goal was considered successfully met when the post-survey demonstrated a positive statistically significant difference in the pre-and post-survey scores.

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<sup>6</sup>See Neil J. Salkind, *Statistics for People Who (Think They) Hate Statistics*, 4th ed. (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 2011).

<sup>7</sup>Washington Baptist Church averages roughly 45 in Sunday morning attendance. A sample of 20 adult and teen members represents a large portion of the congregation.

## Definitions and Limitations/Delimitations

Some terms used throughout this ministry project are defined below to aid the reader's understanding of the subject.

*Prosperity Theology.* For the purpose of this project, the Word-of-Faith movement will be considered part of the prosperity theology movement. While containing many shades and subgroups, prosperity theology can best be defined as “the teaching that believers have a right to the blessings of health and wealth and that they can obtain these blessings through positive confessions of faith and the ‘sowing of seeds’ through the faithful payments of tithes and offerings.”<sup>8</sup>

*Gospel.* The gospel, or the good news, is

that the one and only God, who is holy, made us in his image to know him. But we sinned and cut ourselves off from him. In his great love, God became a man in Jesus, lived a perfect life, and died on the cross, thus fulfilling the law himself and taking on himself the punishment for the sins of all those who would ever turn and trust him. He rose again from the dead, showing that God accepted Christ's sacrifice and that God's wrath against us has been exhausted. He now calls us to repent of our sins and trust in Christ alone for our forgiveness. If we repent of our sins and trust in Christ, we are born again into a new life, an eternal life with God.<sup>9</sup>

A simpler definition is given by Horton, who defines the gospel as “that specific announcement of redemption from sin and death in Jesus Christ, promised and fulfilled in history.”<sup>10</sup>

*Evangelical doctrine/theology.* For the purpose of this project, “doctrine” and “theology” will be used interchangeably. Doctrine may be defined as “a belief or teaching regarding theological themes, that is, a tenet regarding the nature of God and his works.”<sup>11</sup> A more workable and simpler definition is provided by Horton. Doctrine is

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<sup>8</sup>“Lausanne Theology Group Statement on the Prosperity Gospel,” *Evangelical Review of Theology* 34, no. 2 (April 2010): 99. See also Shayne Lee, “T.D. Jakes and the Gospel of the Almighty Dollar,” *Crosscurrents* 57, no. 2 (Summer 2007): 227-36. See also Jason Byassee, “The Health and Wealth Gospel: Be Happy,” *Christian Century*, July 12, 2005, 20-21.

<sup>9</sup>Mark Dever, *The Gospel and Personal Evangelism* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2007), 43.

<sup>10</sup>Michael Horton, *The Christian Faith: A Systematic Theology for Pilgrims on the Way* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 201.

<sup>11</sup>Millard J. Erickson, *Concise Dictionary of Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1986), 45. A less technical definition is provided by Erickson in *Introducing Christian Doctrine*, where he writes,



“teaching that comes from God.”<sup>12</sup> Evangelical theology is simply defined as “a rational discourse about God that maintains that there are certain essential Christian beliefs.”<sup>13</sup> This is simplified even more by Horton, who defines theology as “the study of God.”<sup>14</sup> For the purpose of this project, “theology” and “doctrine” will be used to refer to the study of God and his teaching as found in the text of Scripture, God’s special revelation.<sup>15</sup>

*New Apostolic Reformation.* As the one responsible for coining the term, C. Peter Wagner defines the New Apostolic Reformation (NAR) as “an extraordinary work of God at the close of the twentieth century that is, to a significant extent, changing the shape of Protestant Christianity around the world.”<sup>16</sup> This “Reformation” is fleshed out primarily in the belief that the New Testament office of Apostle has continued into the modern church, and that Apostles should actually be leading churches while receiving continuing revelation in addition to Scripture.<sup>17</sup>

Several delimitations were placed on the project. Participants were required to be adult or teen members of WBC who had completed the pre-series survey. Membership ensures that they are believers who are in covenant with WBC and committed to its

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“Christian doctrine is simply statements of the most fundamental beliefs that the Christian has, beliefs about the nature of God, about his action, about us who are his creatures, and about what he has done to bring us into relationship with himself.” Millard J. Erickson, *Introducing Christian Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992), 16.

<sup>12</sup>Horton, *Christian Faith*, 98-99. See also Erickson, *Introducing Christian Doctrine*, 350-352. Erickson lists the theological points of the gospel, then makes the very important observation that “we will all be evaluated on the basis of our personal attitude toward and response to the gospel” (351). See also John MacArthur, *The Gospel According to Jesus: What Is Authentic Faith* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988), and John Piper, *What Jesus Demands from the World* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2006) for thorough discussions of what the gospel is and how it is to be applied.

<sup>13</sup>Norman Geisler, *Systematic Theology* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 2002), 1:15.

<sup>14</sup>Horton, *Christian Faith*, 13.

<sup>15</sup>More discussion of these terms can be found in L. Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1939), and in Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine: A Canonical-Linguistic Approach to Christian Theology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005).

<sup>16</sup>C. Peter Wagner, ed., *The New Apostolic Churches* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1998), 18.

<sup>17</sup>*Ibid.*, 18-25.

teachings and values. Participants were also expected to be in attendance for each Sunday morning service during the twenty-week series. If a service was missed, a recording of the sermon was provided. Another delimitation was the need to condense the material into twenty weeks. A comprehensive study of every major Christian doctrine is not possible within that time frame. Those doctrines most vital to a clear understanding of the gospel were given priority, with direct application being made to how they differ from the teachings of prosperity theology and the NAR.

### **Conclusion**

God has called together a body of believers redeemed by the blood of his Son. That body, called the church, must root itself firmly in the sound teachings of Scripture. In so doing, individual members will be equipped to defend against error. The following chapters will show the importance of a commitment to sound doctrine within the local church. Chapter two will focus on Scripture's emphasis on the need for sound doctrine and chapter three will focus on several specific doctrines as well as the basic roots and teachings of prosperity theology and the NAR.

## CHAPTER 2

### BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL SUPPORT FOR TEACHING AND DEFENDING SOUND DOCTRINE IN THE LOCAL CHURCH

#### **Introduction**

The thesis of this chapter is that Scripture makes it clear that the church is to study, teach, and defend sound doctrine against false teaching. Five New Testament passages will be addressed, revealing both the importance of sound doctrine, the danger of false doctrine, and the mandated response to false teaching on the part of the elders of the church.

#### **Sound Doctrine as a Pillar of Early Church Life (Acts 2:42)**

After Pentecost and the powerful moving of the Spirit that took place, thousands of new believers were organized into local congregations. A community of faith was being formed and Acts 2:42 lists the hooks upon which that community would hang. “And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.” Darrell Bock observes that, “community life is summarized as involving four key areas: apostolic teaching, fellowship, the breaking of bread together, and prayer.”<sup>1</sup> All four will be addressed, but the focus here will be on the “apostles’ teaching.”

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<sup>1</sup>Darrell L. Bock, *Acts*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 149.

## The Importance of a Centralized Focus

All groups need at least two things in common: a defined membership and a common focus. For the early church, the membership was defined by those who had responded to the call of the gospel and placed their faith and trust in Christ (Acts 2:37-41). Acts 2:42 tells the reader that these believers then “devoted themselves” to four things. “Devoted” carries the idea of “persistence or persevering in something...the imperfect periphrastic construction speaks of the ongoing devotion that they have.”<sup>2</sup> Fernando Ajith describes them as continuing “in faithful adherence to the newly formed community.”<sup>3</sup>

The second thing the early church had in common was “fellowship.” The word translated “fellowship” is *koinonia*, which indicates a close relationship, even a brotherly unity among the early believers.<sup>4</sup> This was not a loose association of believers, but a tightly knit community of faith. A large part of that closeness came from the common body of doctrine the early church shared.

The early Christians also devoted themselves to the “breaking of bread.” Scholars are divided on whether this term points to the formal practice of the Lord’s Supper or whether it simply indicates the sharing of meals among the early Christians. Either way, it again emphasizes the close-knit unity of the early church.

The final common element was “the prayers.” This was a community of faith that prayed together. While a theology of prayer is developed in far more detail in other places in the New Testament, it’s position here is telling. Prayer is viewed and treated as an intensely personal spiritual discipline. Luke wants the reader to understand that public and corporate prayer was one of the most important aspects of life in the early church.

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<sup>2</sup>Bock, *Acts*, 149.

<sup>3</sup>Fernando Ajith, *Acts*, NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 119.

<sup>4</sup>Walter Bauer, William F. Arndt, and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), 439.

## The Content of Their Centralized Focus

What was the teaching that was so important that it became one of the four foci around which the early church was built? Luke simply calls it “the apostles’ teaching.” What was the content of that teaching? Fitzmyer believes that “the ‘teaching’ of the apostles means more than the *kerygma*, ‘the proclamation’ about the death, resurrection, and significance of Christ.”<sup>5</sup> So, the body of doctrine that the early church was grounded in went beyond just the simple truths of the gospel. In fact, the “apostles’ teaching” was “the teaching of the Lord communicated through the apostles in the power of the Spirit.”<sup>6</sup> How much of what would be revealed in the completed canon of Scripture was taught orally through the apostles is impossible to know. What is clear is that there was a centralized set of doctrines being taught, and those doctrines constituted a vitally important element of the early church. That made teaching an important part of the new community of faith.<sup>7</sup> During a period when access to written texts was limited and expensive, and many simply could not read, having people who could take a body of teaching and accurately communicate it to a congregation was of great value. Alignment with the apostles’ teaching was so important that much of the rest of the New Testament deals with attacks on sound doctrine and on cleansing the church of false teachers. Fernando Ajith observes that “teaching was so important to the life of the church that when Paul gave Timothy a list of qualifications for elders, the only ability-related qualification mentioned was the ability to teach (1 Tim. 3:2).”<sup>8</sup>

So even from the earliest days of the church, a consistent and sound body of doctrine was required for the unity and health of the church. This unity and doctrine

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<sup>5</sup>Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Acts of the Apostles*, Anchor Bible Commentary (New York: Doubleday, 1998), 269.

<sup>6</sup>F. F. Bruce, *The Book of the Acts*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 73.

<sup>7</sup>Bock, *Acts*, 150.

<sup>8</sup>Ajith, *Acts*, 126.

would quickly be put to the test, as the rest of the book of Acts would flesh out. Religious leaders would oppose the church (Acts 4), Satan would seek to disrupt the body from within (Acts 5 and 6), members of the church would be murdered (Acts 7), while others would be persecuted and imprisoned (Acts 8). In a magnificent display of divine sovereignty, one of the greatest enemies of the church would become one of its greatest teachers (Acts 9), and the gospel would move beyond the Jewish people to penetrate the hearts of Gentiles (Acts 10). Plenty more would follow: some would be put to death while others were miraculously delivered (Acts 12). Missionaries would take the good news all throughout the known world (Acts 13-14). With the addition of Gentiles to the church, unique challenges would present themselves, and important meetings would have to be called (Acts 15). Paul would give warning to elders of churches that he had planted about the dangers that would come from false teachers (Acts 20). And eventually, the gospel would take Paul to the very center of the known world (Acts 28). With every challenge, the integrity and unity of the church would be tested. The need was great for men who could study, understand, and communicate to others the teachings of Scripture.

### **Sound Doctrine as a Means of Maturing the Body of Christ (Eph. 4:11-14)**

In Ephesians 4:11-14, Paul explains to the church at Ephesus the nature of some of the gifts that Christ gives to those who minister among his people. While several important gifts are listed, the focus here will be on the “shepherds and teachers” and how those gifts help bring the body of Christ to its intended goal of maturity.

#### **Gifts or Offices?**

There has been some discussion about the nature of the gifts listed in Ephesians 4. Are they officers given to the church to serve in formal roles? Or are they simply gifted people who may or may not hold a formal position within the church? Hoehner argues that “Paul is listing gifts and not offices,” though he goes on to relate the

terms to each other in a way that seems to indicate that the distinction may not be as firm as he suggests.<sup>9</sup> Along those lines, O'Brien suggests that the idea that these are functions and not offices "is to introduce a false antithesis."<sup>10</sup> It would seem best to understand the terms as gifts while also realizing that there is significant crossover between function and form, especially in the case of pastors and teachers. For purpose of discussion, Ephesians 4:11 points to men and women who have been spiritually gifted for the task of "pastoring" and "teaching." These men and women may or may not function in formal offices or positions in their local churches but are given abilities that are designed by God to help their local church move closer to the goal of maturity.

A related question emerges concerning the relationship of "shepherds and teachers" in the text of Ephesians. "The pastors and teachers are linked here by a single definite article in the Greek, which suggests a close association of functions between two kinds of ministers who operate within the one congregation."<sup>11</sup> The reader does not need to understand the Greek language to see that there is something different that Paul is doing when he moves from "the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists" to "the shepherds and teachers." Some have seen the two terms as basically synonymous, but that seems to take the similarities too far. O'Brien's observation of a close association between the two is probably the way to describe the two gifts, though Hoehner's observation that "all pastors are to be teachers, though not all teachers are to be pastors" has much to commend it.<sup>12</sup> The fact is that God has gifted many men and women with the ability to accurately and engagingly teach the Word of God at various levels in the local church. Not all of these will ever serve in an official pastoral capacity.

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<sup>9</sup>Harold Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 539.

<sup>10</sup>Peter O'Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 301.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., 300.

<sup>12</sup>Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 544.

Ephesians 4:11 makes it clear that Christ has given certain gifts to members of his body, and that two of those gifts are those who are equipped to shepherd (or pastor) and teach. A pastor is simply “one who cares for his or her flock as a shepherd cares for his or her sheep.”<sup>13</sup> This concept will become a vitally important one to understand in shaping the role of the pastor in the local church- the shepherd must be ready to lead his flock to water and grass, and to intervene when wolves threaten.

### **Who Does the Work?**

Ephesians 4:12 presents an interesting grammatical challenge that must be briefly addressed because of how it has been rendered in English versions. One rendering is seen in the King James Version (KJV) and has the three clauses of verse 12 as parallel, making the pastors, teachers, apostles, and prophets the ones who “equip the saints,” “do the work of the ministry,” and “build up the body of Christ.” This translation creates a strong distinction between the clergy and the laity. Two classes of members in the local church emerge. First are the clergy, who do all the work, and second the laity, who are basically passive in the process. While this may be a slight oversimplification, it gives the sense of how this translation functions. This way of looking at the text, while grammatically feasible, is not the best option. Instead, “the alternate view argues that the second and third prepositional phrases are dependent on the first and that it is the entire church that is responsible for the work of the ministry.”<sup>14</sup> This translation tears down the wall between clergy and laity and defines the roles of each. The pastors and teachers are to equip the saints. The saints are then to do the work of the ministry, with the result being that the body of Christ is built up. Or, as Hoehner puts it, “Every believer must do the work of the ministry.”<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup>Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 544.

<sup>14</sup>O’Brien, *Letter to the Ephesians*, 262.

<sup>15</sup>Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 549.



## **The Goal of the Ministry**

Verse 13 makes it clear that there is a goal in mind for the process of equipping and doing: “Until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.” This goal is expressed in four ways. First, it is important to see the inclusiveness of this goal. The work is to be done until “all” attain. “All” points back to “saints” in verse 12 and includes all true believers. A common goal is set for all who have put their faith and trust in Christ.

The first part of the goal is the “unity of the faith.” “Faith” here is an objective genitive and carries the idea of the “content of the faith.”<sup>16</sup> Paul wants sound teaching in the church because it is vitally important that Christians grow in unity that is rooted in the faith found in authoritative Scripture. This cannot be overstated. The unity of the church is rooted in something tangible. A group of people can come together and unify around almost anything, but believers in Christ are unified around a body of doctrines objectively stated in the writings of Holy Scripture.

The second part of the goal is that Christians are to grow in the “knowledge of the Son of God.” Sound teaching and teachers move believers to a deeper knowledge of Christ. Application of truth is important in the local church, as the Word of God must be applied to the lives of the people. But with that application must come a deeper knowledge and understanding of the teachings of Scripture and the God who authored them.

The third part of the goal for the church is “mature manhood.” There are two points to note. First is that “mature” carries “the ethical idea of fully grown or mature.”<sup>17</sup> This is a constant reminder that the sanctification of the body of Christ has a point; it is

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<sup>16</sup>Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 553.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid.

“going” somewhere. Like a child who naturally transitions from infant to toddler to preschool to elementary to teen to adult, the church is never to be stagnant, but always progressing in growth towards a stated goal. Second, “the singular form ‘mature person’ points to a body of believers, not to individual believers in the body.”<sup>18</sup> This is important for Christians to understand because it brings out the corporate nature of the sanctification process and of the goal that has been set before the body of Christ. A Christian is not meant to exist outside of the church, and the church is a corporate body made up of individual believers who are growing together. This flies in the face of much of the rampant individualism that has become entrenched among American believers. Christians need other Christians. Sanctification is a group activity.

There is a goal for the church that is not met when someone simply receives Christ as Savior. Christ has bestowed gifted men and women on the local church to help accomplish his desired purpose for the church-that it become mature and grown up.

### **Sound Doctrine as a Requirement for the Office of Elder (Titus 1:5-16)**

As the early church developed and the apostles began to pass from the scene, the need for leadership in the churches became obvious. Not only did the church need leaders, but those leaders had to fill specific roles and have specific skill sets in order to navigate the theological challenges that would come. The apostles had seen massive challenges coming and gave both warnings about them and procedures for protecting against them. A case in point is Acts 20:17-38. Here, Paul gathers together the elders of the church in Ephesus and describes to them the challenges ahead. He warns of “fierce wolves” entering the congregation (v. 29), that some of these wolves would come from within the congregation itself (v. 30), and that the primary defense they had was to be “alert” for these attackers (v. 31).

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<sup>18</sup>Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 553.

## Elders Must Be Qualified Men

As Paul writes, he makes it clear that one of the primary reasons Titus was left behind was that he might “appoint elders in every town” (v. 5). At this very early stage in the development of the church, it appears that both Paul and Titus were in Crete. Paul had to leave, and he left Titus behind to appoint and develop qualified leadership.<sup>19</sup>

The qualifications for these leaders are given in verses 6-9. An elder must be “above reproach.” “This stands as the summary title and is Paul’s primary concern.”<sup>20</sup> It functions as a sort of “umbrella” that is fleshed out in the following requirements.

What exactly “the husband of one wife” refers to has been debated for centuries, especially as it relates to divorce and remarriage. Towner wisely observes that whether a man has been divorced is not what is in view. Instead, Paul describes “fidelity within marriage and does not specifically delve into matters of polygamy or remarriage.”<sup>21</sup> In other words, to be considered for leadership in the local church, a man must be completely dedicated to his wife. Men in this role are going to face intense spiritual attack, and they must be dedicated to their wives or their marriages will suffer. This can be uncomfortable because it requires more than just a glance at what a married couple looks like on Sunday morning. Those in charge of nominating these men must be able to consider the homes of potential leaders and really get to see the strength of the marriage.

The next clause addresses the children of the elder. This is another requirement that has created some level of discussion. Paul states that the elder’s children must be “believers.” What exactly this means, how far it extends as far as age and how one

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<sup>19</sup>J. N. D. Kelly, *A Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles: I Timothy, II Timothy, Titus* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), 230.

<sup>20</sup>William D. Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, Word Biblical Commentary, V. 46 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2000), 388.

<sup>21</sup>Philip H. Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 682.

determines genuine faith is beyond the scope of this discussion.

Verse 7 repeats the requirement of “being above reproach,” and gives a reason: an elder is a “steward.” “Why is it important for a church leader to be above reproach because the church is the household of God and he is a steward in that house.”<sup>22</sup> A steward is one who oversees someone else’s property. A pastor is God’s steward of a local body of believers. As a result, he must not be “arrogant” or “quick-tempered.” Arrogance carries the idea of “a self-loving spirit, which in seeking only to gratify itself is regardless of others.”<sup>23</sup> Patience is also required. The life of an elder is challenging. Someone who naturally loses his temper quickly simply will not fit.

The next three requirements are easy to identify. A church leader cannot be a “drunkard or violent or greedy for gain.” These are men who must be able to practice self-control in their lives. All three of these qualifications speak to excess in the personal life. A leader must be disciplined. A casual drink cannot become a habit. His temper must not regularly get the best of him. He must not allow himself to use the ministry as a means of enriching himself.

Verse 8 looks at things in a more positive light. An elder must be “hospitable, a lover of good, self-controlled, upright, holy, and disciplined.” These are important positive markers that a congregation must look for in potential leaders. Hospitality is a key means of getting to know the members of a local congregation. An elder must love good. “Good” is that which is defined by God as good, and Scripture is full of references to those things. Self-control has already been dealt with. To be “upright” and “holy” fit together. “Upright” carries the image of being firm and unmovable, while “holy” refers to someone who has been set apart from the world and set apart for God’s exclusive use.

But it is in verse 9 that Paul gets to the heart of an elder’s qualifications. “He

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<sup>22</sup>Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 389.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., 390.

must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it.” Elders in the church must “hold firm” (cling to, hold fast to, be devoted to)<sup>24</sup> to apostolic doctrine. “The elder must hold to God’s word which is in accordance with the recognized body of Christian truth taught by the apostles.”<sup>25</sup> It would be this “trustworthy word” that would encapsulate the doctrines that would eventually make up the New Testament. An elder must be a man who knows and holds firmly to the teachings of Scripture.

Paul gives two reasons in verse 9 why an elder must hold so tenaciously to the teachings of Scripture. First, so that elders may “give instruction in sound doctrine.” Elders must be able to teach the Word! Their authority is a derived authority, and it comes from the inspired text of Scripture. Too much preaching is weak because it begins with the authority or personality of the preacher rather than the text. It is in this sense that an elder must function much like an Old Testament prophet. A prophet did not get to pick his own message. He spoke the words of God to the people of God. Second, the elder must be able to “rebuke those who contradict it.” This is where many pastors and elders struggle. “It is here, in the twofold talk of building up the faithful and eliminating error, that, as an elder who is also an overseer, he faces his chief challenge.”<sup>26</sup> Making a commitment to teaching what is found in the text of Scripture is relatively easy when compared with the challenge of rebuking those who contradict the teachings of Scripture. And yet, in the modern theological climate, it is this ability of discernment and boldness that is needed most. A pastor must be able to enter the nuanced theological debates of the day and identify those positions that are not in accordance with Scripture.

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<sup>24</sup>George W. Knight III, *The Pastoral Epistles: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 293.

<sup>25</sup>Homer A. Kent, *The Pastoral Epistles*, Kent Collection (Winona Lake, IN: BMH Books, 1995), 215.

<sup>26</sup>Kelly, *Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles*, 232.

## Elders Must Be on Guard

Why must elders be such qualified men? Why must they be able to teach truth and refute error? Paul answers that question beginning in verse 10.<sup>27</sup> “Many” would arise and seek to undermine the work of the ministry. Paul speaks of a group of people who will come from within the church and who will function as “deceivers.” These are “insubordinate,” or disrespectful of authority. They also are “empty talkers,” or those who use “impressive language with little or no solid content of truth.”<sup>28</sup> In short, the spiritual warfare that is waged all around the world will enter the church itself. No place in a fallen world is free from the taint of sin and the attack of false teachers.

In an age of tolerance and political correctness, Paul’s solution to the problem of false teachers in verse 11 is rather jarring. He states that “they must be silenced, since they are upsetting whole families by teaching for shameful gain what they ought not to teach.” “They must be silenced.” This is a strong word, meaning “to put a muzzle, not simply a bridle, on an animal’s mouth.”<sup>29</sup> Strong men of character must be willing to put a stop to false teaching. The second half of the verse gives another reason why. These people are “upsetting whole families.” This does not mean that families are getting emotionally distraught by the false teaching, but rather that these false teachers are actually “overturning the faith of” entire families.<sup>30</sup> From a human perspective, eternity is on the line in this fight! One of the vital roles of elders in the church is to identify and silence false teaching in the local church. This is important in today’s climate because too often the church is seen as a place where there should be a free exchange of ideas and positions. To a degree this is true, but a line must be drawn somewhere, and those who

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<sup>27</sup>Gordon Fee and Ward Gasque, *1 and 2 Timothy, Titus*, New International Biblical Commentary (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1988), 177.

<sup>28</sup>Kelly, *Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles*, 234.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid.

<sup>30</sup>Fee and Gasque, *1 and 2 Timothy, Titus*, 178.

try to advance teachings that run contrary to Scripture must be silenced.

In verse 13, Paul gives some instruction on how to go about silencing false teachers. Elders are to “rebuke them sharply.” Unfortunately, “this is the only type of rebuke that will get through to them.”<sup>31</sup> The purity of the teaching among the flock must be protected. Some difference of opinion exists about to whom “them” refers. It most likely refers to the false teachers themselves. But the reference could also be to “Cretan believers who are disposed to follow the false teachers because of their own Cretan traits.”<sup>32</sup> Most likely there is room for some overlap. The false teachers must be silenced, and a rebuke must be given publicly both to them and to those who are following them. Important to note is that “the purpose, however, is restorative, not vindictive.”<sup>33</sup> Even in their fall into error, Paul is concerned for those within the church. A clear line is not always evident between genuine believers who are struggling with error and professing believers who are not actually part of the body of Christ. False teachers need to be called back to pure doctrine and struggling believers need to have a clear path laid out in front of them. Verse 14 explains further that a rebuke must be given to warn people away from “the commands of people who turn away from the truth.”

Paul closes the section by further describing some of these false teachers. They are those who are “defiled and unbelieving” (v. 15), and whose “minds and consciences are defiled” (v. 15). In verse 16, he goes on to state, “They profess to know God, but they deny him by their works. They are detestable, disobedient, unfit for any good work.” Important to note is that these are people who “profess” (“declare publicly or claim to know”<sup>34</sup>) to know God. These are not angry “Christian-haters,” but people who proclaim

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<sup>31</sup>Knight, *Pastoral Epistles*, 299.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., 300.

<sup>33</sup>Kent, *Pastoral Epistles*, 218.

<sup>34</sup>Knight, *Pastoral Epistles*, 303.

faith in Christ and personal knowledge of God! This increases the need for vigilance among those tasked with preaching, teaching, and shepherding the flock. Paul's condemnation is strong. They are "unfit for any good work." "Unfit" means to "not stand the test or to be disqualified."<sup>35</sup> A major change must take place in these men before they can accomplish anything of eternal value.

### **Sound Doctrine as a Measuring Stick for All Other Teaching (1 Tim 1:3-7)**

It began in the Garden of Eden when Satan asked a simple question. "Did God really say?" With that question, the goodness of God, the authority of God, and the holiness of God were all brought into question. That basic strategy has not changed over the years. Satan still attacks the people of God by questioning the words of God. Paul knew this strategy. When Paul left Ephesus and travelled to Macedonia, he intentionally left Timothy behind with clear instructions as to his role. Vicious wolves had entered the church at Ephesus, and Timothy was not to take a passive stance towards them.

### **False Teachers Must Be Confronted (1 Tim 1:3-4)**

Paul uses strong language in his command to Timothy. He "urged" Timothy. This "has the characteristic of personal concern,"<sup>36</sup> while being "both authoritative and personal."<sup>37</sup> Paul left Timothy behind for a specific task: to "charge certain persons not to teach any different doctrine." "Charge" means "to forbid."<sup>38</sup> It is a military term meaning "give strict orders."<sup>39</sup> This is significant. In a world in which false teaching is too often allowed to coexist alongside sound teaching, Paul has a different plan. He leaves Timothy

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<sup>35</sup>Knight, *Pastoral Epistles*, 303.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., 72.

<sup>37</sup>Knight, *Pastoral Epistles*, 71.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid., 72.

<sup>39</sup>Kelly, *Pastoral Epistles*, 43.



behind in a church specifically to forbid certain people from teaching things that run contrary to biblical doctrine. “There is only one right theology; every other theology is wrong.”<sup>40</sup>

Verse 4 then goes on to give some of the content of the false teaching. False teachers are people who “devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies.” What exactly these things were and how they translate into the modern church are subjects that have been discussed in various settings. They are not as relevant to this discussion as is the result. This devotion on the part of the false teachers leads them into “speculations” and away from the “stewardship” that has been entrusted to them. This translates to the modern church in a clear and straightforward way. Teachings arise within the church that elevate pointless discussion and speculation over the clear teaching of the Word of God. This is dangerous because it takes the focus off of Scripture. Once that focus is lost, people lose their ability to discern and serious error can incrementally take hold. Small distractions over time become major diversions into error. That is why false teachers must be rebuked by well qualified men.

### **Confrontation Must Be Done with the Goal of Love (1 Tim 1:5-6)**

Paul makes it clear that the “aim” (goal<sup>41</sup>) of his charge to Timothy is to produce love. Those who teach the congregation will do so with gravity and seriousness if their teaching comes from a deep-rooted love for the people they minister to. But this love must be untainted. It is love that must come from a “pure heart,” a “good conscience,” and a “sincere faith.” A good conscience is “one that is free from feelings of guilt.”<sup>42</sup> A “sincere” faith is a faith that is not hypocritical. This term “emphasizes the

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<sup>40</sup>Philip Graham Ryken, *1 Timothy*, Reformed Expository Commentary (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing Company, 2007), 8.

<sup>41</sup>Kent, *Pastoral Epistles*, 79.

<sup>42</sup>Kelly, *Pastoral Epistles*, 47.

quality of genuineness.”<sup>43</sup> Teachers with tainted motives will be open to compromise. Paul is concerned that false teachers in the church be confronted, but that they be confronted with a purpose-love for the people they are ministering to.

### **Teachers Must Constantly Be on Guard Against Drift (1 Tim 1:6-7)**

Paul gives a chilling warning in verse 6. The assumption too easily arises that false teachers are those who have never truly understood or accepted the faith, and that they have had malicious intentions from the very beginning. Paul seems to challenge this assumption. He states that “certain persons, by swerving from these, have wandered away into vain discussion.” The picture here is of teachers who at one point possessed a “pure heart,” “good conscience,” and “sincere faith,” but have “swerved” from them. This drift leads them into “vain discussion.” They have gone from teaching the deep things of God out of concern for his people to entering into empty and fruitless discussions instead.<sup>44</sup> Where once time was invested in teaching and discussing the great doctrines passed down from the apostles, now that time is spent bantering back and forth on issues that carry no eternal weight.

Where does this kind of drift lead? A dangerous place. In verse 7, Paul goes on to state that these false teachers don’t understand what they are saying, but they say it with great confidence. “There is a dangerous combination here: arrogance and ignorance.”<sup>45</sup> Kent puts it like this: “Men often yell loudest about that of which they know least.”<sup>46</sup> The danger here cannot be overstated and must be placed into the larger context of this discussion. When people make bold and confident pronouncements about

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<sup>43</sup>Luke Timothy Johnson, *The First and Second Letters to Timothy*, Anchor Bible Commentary (New York: Doubleday, 2001), 166.

<sup>44</sup>Knight, *Pastoral Epistles*, 79.

<sup>45</sup>Ryken, *1 Timothy*, 11.

<sup>46</sup>Kent, *Pastoral Epistles*, 76.

issues that they do not truly understand, they can easily take large segments of a church with them into error and distraction. This can destroy a church. Qualified elders and pastors are needed in the local church who will competently teach sound doctrine while confidently confronting false teachers, realizing that they themselves must be careful not to slip into error.

### **Sound Doctrine Used to Combat Pride in the Church (1 Tim 6:3-5)**

Paul gives another warning to Timothy about false teachers in the church. In 1 Timothy 6, Paul deals more with the heart and motivations of a false teacher. This is telling, because it demonstrates that underneath the smile and friendly exterior of a false teacher lies a heart that has sold itself to unhealthy things. It also serves as a warning that to truly discern false teaching and false teachers, the examination must go deeper than a simple surface-level glance.

### **The Test of Sound Doctrine: The Words of Jesus (1 Tim 6:3)**

Paul makes it clear what the standard for acceptable teaching is. It is “the sound words of our Lord Jesus Christ and the teaching that accords with godliness.” The teachers in focus are anyone “who teaches a different doctrine.” “This is one different from the apostolic teaching and therefore to be regarded as false.”<sup>47</sup> What are these teachings different from? The “sound” words of Jesus. The term “sound” is a medical term that carries the idea of healthy or wholesome.<sup>48</sup> The teachings of Christ then are the standard of health for the local church. Anything “different” must be confronted. This is “the root cause of the errorists’ deviation; they do not give their mind to the gospel and

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<sup>47</sup>Knight, *Pastoral Epistles*, 249.

<sup>48</sup>Ryken, *1 Timothy*, 250.

the church's teaching founded on it."<sup>49</sup> A behavioral component is present as well. Sound doctrine leads to behavior that is consistent with godliness. In other words, the sound words of Jesus are meant to bring the church to a desired goal. Not just a better knowledge of him, but a pattern of behavior that is consistent with his character. Anything that takes away from this is a distraction to the local church.

### **The Distraction from Sound Doctrine: Pride and Greed (1 Tim 6:4-5)**

Paul describes these false teachers as being “puffed up with conceit and understanding nothing.” Their arrogance has blinded them to the fact that they do not truly understand what they are talking about. Instead of the “healthy” words of Jesus, they are attracted to “unhealthy craving for controversy.” Paul is intentionally making a contrast here: the “sound” (healthy) words of Jesus are set against the “unhealthy” or sick cravings of pride-consuming false teachers.<sup>50</sup> These false teachers crave controversy and quarrels over words. When they enter a church, they leave a trail of envy, dissension, slander, evil suspicions, and constant friction in their wake. Paul then reveals their inner motivation as he characterizes them as “imagining that godliness is a means of gain.” In their pride and arrogance, these teachers have fallen prey to the mentality that they can use the Christian life as a means of enriching themselves financially. While this comes as no surprise to twenty-first century Christians, who have seen a parade of hucksters and phonies try to make their fortunes in the name of Christ, the shock value of Paul's statement must not be lost. Paul warns Timothy that teachers who have swerved from the faith can end up in a place that runs completely contrary to the pattern and example of Jesus. Instead of being humble and self-sacrificing in their leadership, these teachers get to the point that they see the ministry of the gospel as a means of financial gain.

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<sup>49</sup>Kelly, *Pastoral Epistles*, 133.

<sup>50</sup>Kent, *Pastoral Epistles*, 186.

Churches need qualified leaders. They need elders and pastors who will study and teach the Scriptures. They also need elders and pastors who will rebuke and refute error when it arises. This is not an easy task, but it is a worthy task, and the alternative is negligence that leads to theological disaster within the church.

CHAPTER 3  
THEORETICAL, PRACTICAL, AND HISTORICAL  
ISSUES RELATED TO TEACHING AND  
DEFENDING SOUND DOCTRINE IN  
THE LOCAL CHURCH

**Introduction**

The thesis of this chapter is that specific theological errors have begun to influence the evangelical church. Steps must be taken to identify and counter these influences. In the specific context of Washington Baptist Church, there are two major forms of false teaching that have become prominent and therefore must be addressed. The first is the faith movement often referred to as the “health and wealth gospel,” or the “Word of Faith” movement. This movement has been in existence for quite some time but has recently gone mainstream in the writings and teachings of people such as Joel Osteen and Joyce Meyer. The second false teaching that must be addressed is what is commonly referred to as the “New Apostolic Reformation” (or NAR). This movement, made prominent by men such as Peter Wagner, advocates for modern-day apostles in the same vein as the first century apostles. The third section of this chapter will deal with how biblical teaching is related to the key theological issues in this discussion, especially emphasizing the gospel, sanctification, the place of suffering, and the question of new revelation.

**The Prosperity Gospel Has Made Inroads  
into the Evangelical Church**

While the prosperity gospel is not new, it is reaching into otherwise theologically orthodox churches in ways previously unheard of, largely through the teaching ministries of people like Joel Osteen and Joyce Meyer. These people have lent

evangelical credibility to a movement often viewed in the past as on the fringes of orthodoxy.

### **Why Is This Relevant?**

“Evangelical churches are full of people who, perhaps unknowingly, regularly watch prosperity gospel teachers on television.”<sup>1</sup> Their teaching and influence is everywhere. One need only go into a local Christian bookstore and find their writings right next to those of orthodox evangelicals. Often, prosperity gospel teachers have television programs that run before or after well respected pastors. They are polished, they are smooth, and they incorporate a lot of Scripture into their messages. Joel Osteen’s television program is available in one hundred countries, and over a million people download his services each week.<sup>2</sup>

In addition to television and internet, the prosperity gospel has “gone mainstream,” with advocates often accepted as within the bounds of evangelical theology. This has removed the stigma often associated with these teachings and has resulted in churches exploding in size. “Fifty of the largest two hundred sixty churches in the United States promote the prosperity gospel.”<sup>3</sup> Masses of professing Christians have bought into this theology. “A recent study found that in the United States, 46 percent of self-proclaimed Christians agree with the idea that God will grant material riches to all believers who have enough faith.”<sup>4</sup>

Why has such a message made inroads in the Christian church both in the United States and all over the world? David Jones and Russell Woodbridge offer seven

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<sup>1</sup>David W. Jones and Russell S. Woodbridge, *Health, Wealth & Happiness: Has the Prosperity Gospel Overshadowed the Gospel of Christ?* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2011), 14.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 16.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., 15.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., 16.

reasons that are worth considering: First, the prosperity gospel contains a grain of truth. It incorporates aspects of God's nature and love for His children that appeal to people, then makes inappropriate applications. Second, the prosperity gospel appeals to the natural human desire to be successful, healthy, and financially secure. Third, it promises much and requires little. Fourth, prosperity theology is usually presented by someone who is polished and winsome in their manner. Fifth, many who buy into the prosperity teachings have little knowledge of biblical doctrine. Sixth, some people have experienced success or healing and have attributed it to the prosperity teachings. Seventh, there is a general lack of discernment among many within Christian churches today, making them susceptible to this corrupt teaching.<sup>5</sup> When the evidence is considered, it is obvious that the influence of the prosperity gospel on the Christian church is a genuine and urgent problem that must be addressed.

### **Where Did These Teachings Originate?**

Because the teachers of the prosperity gospel draw some of their basic teachings from different places, there is ambiguity surrounding the roots of the movement and its basic teachings. Almost all teachers claim Kenneth Hagin as the "father" of the movement, but there is debate over the origins of his teachings, mainly surrounding his use of the writings of E. W. Kenyon. There are two general streams of thought.

First, some claim that Hagin plagiarized much of his material directly from Kenyon.<sup>6</sup> The argument is that Kenyon got much of his theology from the New Thought movement. Jones argues that "the prosperity gospel is built upon a quasi-Christian heresy known as the New Thought movement, an ideology that gained popularity in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century."<sup>7</sup> McConnell goes so far as to attribute much of

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<sup>5</sup>Jones and Woodbridge, *Health, Wealth & Happiness*, 18-19.

<sup>6</sup>D. R. McConnell, *A Different Gospel* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1988), 5.

<sup>7</sup>Jones and Woodbridge, *Health, Wealth & Happiness*, 27.



the influence on Kenyon to Christian Science.<sup>8</sup>

Other authors argue that while Kenyon certainly laid a blueprint down for aspects of the word-faith movement, the main body of teaching is rooted in the charismatic and Pentecostal movements. Barron argues that the movement originated with European Pentecostalism before making its way to the United States.<sup>9</sup> He still grants Kenyon an important role in the formation of the movement but tries to argue that it fits more closely into orthodox theology than many give it credit for.<sup>10</sup>

This discussion about origins is important because none of the modern teachers of prosperity theology have written a comprehensive systematic theology. Their beliefs can appear at times to be fuzzy, and there are major points of disagreement among them, so care must be taken in critiquing their teachings. The evidence leans toward the movement having at least some root in the New Thought movement. Jones and Woodbridge give five helpful core beliefs that come from New Thought that help Christians evaluate the teachings of those within the prosperity gospel community.<sup>11</sup> The first core belief is a distorted view of God. Some reject the Trinity, while others try to shape God into an image more in line with their teachings. The second core belief is an elevation of mind over matter. This belief reflects the basic idea that humans can change reality with the power of positive thinking. The third core belief is an exalted view of humankind. This teaching elevates mankind above the level of totally depraved beings that Scripture portrays it to be. The fourth core belief is an emphasis on health and wealth. In Christ, the believer's actual physical sicknesses have been taken away, making illness something that is within someone's head rather than reality. The fifth core belief is

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<sup>8</sup>McConnell, *A Different Gospel*, 15.

<sup>9</sup>Bruce Barron, *The Health and Wealth Gospel: What's Going on Today in a Movement That Has Shaped the Faith of Millions?* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1987), 37-40.

<sup>10</sup>Barron, *Health and Wealth Gospel*, 61.

<sup>11</sup>Jones and Woodbridge, *Health, Wealth & Happiness*, 34-48.

an unorthodox view of salvation. Salvation depends far more on works than on faith. These beliefs underlie to some degree the teachings of the prosperity gospel.

### **Why Is This a Problem for the Church?**

Churches have disagreed over many aspects of theology for centuries. What makes the teachings of prosperity theology a problem worth highlighting? In short, these teachings push people away from the biblical teachings of repentance and faith in the finished work of Christ. But there are more specific problems within the movement.

**Theological Problems.** The prosperity gospel is constructed on faulty theology.<sup>12</sup> Bad theology can have devastating consequences in the church, and this brand is particularly dangerous. First, there is a minimizing or distortion of Jesus.<sup>13</sup> Joel Osteen has become one of the primary faces of the prosperity gospel movement and is considered by most within the media to be an evangelical. In an interview with Byron Pitts on *60 Minutes*, Pitts gave an overview of Osteen’s message, concluding with “not one mention of God in that. Not one mention of Jesus Christ in that.” Osteen replied, “That’s just my message.”<sup>14</sup> Creflo Dollar, another mainstream preacher, openly questions the deity of Christ.<sup>15</sup> When the biblical teaching about Jesus is distorted, the biblical gospel becomes distorted as well. Osteen seems to advance some form of universalism in his preaching. When asked about people who refuse to accept Christ, he said, “Well, I don’t know if I believe they’re wrong. I believe here’s what the Bible teaches and from the Christian faith this is what I believe. But I just think that only God

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<sup>12</sup>Jones and Woodbridge, *Health, Wealth & Happiness*, 81.

<sup>13</sup>*Ibid.*, 86.

<sup>14</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup>John MacArthur, *Strange Fire: The Danger of Offending the Holy Spirit with Counterfeit Worship* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2013), 47.

will judge a person's heart."<sup>16</sup> This, taken in tandem with Osteen's stance that Mormons are "true Christians,"<sup>17</sup> creates a confused and cheapened gospel.

The prosperity gospel also teaches a distorted view of faith. "According to prosperity theology, faith is not a theocentric act of the will, stemming from God; rather it is an anthropocentric spiritual force, directed at God."<sup>18</sup> Faith becomes a means of manipulating spiritual laws that God has put in place to derive a desired benefit. Along with this perspective on faith comes a twisted perspective on the mind and on prayer. Prosperity theology places great emphasis in making "positive confessions" about things that the person desires.<sup>19</sup> If the thought process is right, the object can be obtained. This not only feeds the sinful desires of the flesh but also goes hand in hand with the faulty view of faith explained above. This view of faith impacts adherents' concept of prayer as well. Jones observes that "within prosperity theology, people—rather than God—become the focal point of prayer."<sup>20</sup> Prayer becomes a means of obtaining what is desired by the person praying.

Most of the theological problems with prosperity theology can be traced back to a false view of Scripture and a bad hermeneutic. Verses are either taken out of context or simply chopped up, with selected portions being quoted to support desired positions. One such text is 3 John 2, which reads, "beloved, I pray that all may go well with you and that you may be in good health, as it goes well with your soul." However, the New King James Version (NKJV) uses the term "prosper," which leads to the rendering, "beloved, I pray that you may prosper in all things and be in health, just as your soul prospers." Several prosperity gospel leaders including Oral Roberts and Kenneth Copeland have

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<sup>16</sup>MacArthur, *Strange Fire*, 51.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid.

<sup>18</sup>Jones and Woodbridge, *Health, Wealth & Happiness*, 87.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., 95.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., 97.

cited this verse as key to their understanding of the biblical teaching of health and wealth theology.<sup>21</sup> The problem is that the NKJV makes ambiguous what the ESV makes clear: the word does not intend to convey “the sense of gaining material possessions. Rather, the word means ‘to grant a prosperous expedition and expeditious journey.’”<sup>22</sup> A poor hermeneutic also leads to situations in which the preconceived theology taken from texts such as 3 John 2 forces teachers to speculate about other texts. One such example is Acts 12. Peter is in prison and the church is praying. But when Peter is released and shows up at the door, Rhoda is the only one who believes it is him. This creates a problem because it means that the disciples were not praying with full assurance that their prayers would be answered (a core teaching of prosperity theology). This forces a prosperity teacher to conclude that Rhoda was the only one who was praying with real faith.<sup>23</sup>

In addition to the hermeneutical problems of prosperity theology are the problems that come with claiming new revelation from God in addition to Scripture. While most teachers make it clear that all messages from God must be submitted to the authority of Scripture, the natural tendency is to neglect the written Word and pursue a special revelation that comes through an emotional encounter with the Holy Spirit. This creates a very dangerous situation for those who are supposed to be people of the Book.

**Practical problems.** Anything that points the focus toward man rather than God is going to have some major problems. One of these is that by appealing to man’s base nature, the prosperity gospel brings the kind of government attention that is not helpful for the advancement of Christianity or for the reputation of the church. “The U.S. Senate Finance Committee is currently investigating six ministries—all of which promote

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<sup>21</sup>Jones and Woodbridge, *Health, Wealth & Happiness*, 99.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., 100.

<sup>23</sup>Barron, *Health and Wealth Gospel*, 116.

prosperity theology—to ensure that there has not been a misuse of donations.”<sup>24</sup>

Unfortunately, this cannot be written off as an isolated incident. The world has watched as scandals have erupted around figures like Peter Popoff, Jimmy Swaggart, Ted Haggard, and others.<sup>25</sup> Obviously, greed and moral failure happen all the time in churches that are theologically sound. But the pattern of self-focus and self-gratification with the stamp of divine approval seems to feed these appetites and desires. At the very least, a dissonance is created between the “call on God to give you what you want” message and the Scriptural mandate to deny oneself and follow Christ.

Another practical problem with the prosperity gospel is that it lends itself to massive cases of abuse. While every movement has its weaknesses, the prosperity gospel is built on a model that allows men and women to take advantage of others. One such case is chronicled by Bruce Barron when he recounts the story of Hobart Freeman, a radical teacher who prohibited his followers from seeking medical treatments. Dozens of people died under his teachings as a result.<sup>26</sup> Another extremist is Benny Hinn, whose ministry MacArthur evaluates in light of Scripture and concludes that “he remains the fraudulent face of a false ministry, heading for eternal ruin and taking multitudes of desperate people with him.”<sup>27</sup> In sum, prosperity theology contains far too many problems to be considered a viable option for Bible-believing Christians, and must be rejected and warned against.

### **The New Apostolic Reformation Has Made Inroads into the Evangelical Church**

Many evangelical Christians have never actually heard the term “New

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<sup>24</sup>Jones and Woodbridge, *Health, Wealth & Happiness*, 17.

<sup>25</sup>MacArthur, *Strange Fire*, 56-65. MacArthur traces a host of these accounts in this section of his book.

<sup>26</sup>Barron, *Health and Wealth Gospel*, 14-34.

<sup>27</sup>MacArthur, *Strange Fire*, 175.

Apostolic Reformation.” Yet the influence of this group’s teaching is growing all over the country, from church plants to websites to Christian bookstores. The impact of men like C. Peter Wagner, Rick Joyner and others is growing at a rapid rate. Far from being strictly a “fringe” movement or a flash in the pan historical aberration, what has been coined “NAR” has established itself and has the resources and following to grow in settings all over the world for many years to come.

### **Why Is This Relevant?**

According to C. Peter Wagner, 2001 “marked the beginning of the Second Apostolic Age.”<sup>28</sup> This was Wagner’s assessment of a movement that is rapidly growing all over the world and infiltrating evangelical churches of various types. While the people making up the group referred to here as NAR are somewhat diverse in their beliefs, they share the common belief in “the present-day *offices* of apostle and prophet.”<sup>29</sup> The name “NAR” comes from Wagner himself:

The name I have chosen for this movement is the New Apostolic Reformation. I use “Reformation” because, as I have said, I believe it at least matches the Protestant Reformation in its overall impact; “Apostolic” because the most radical of all the changes is the widespread recognition of the gift and office of apostle in today’s churches; and “New” to distinguish the movement from a number of denominations that use the word “Apostolic” in their official names yet exhibit patterns common to the more traditional churches rather than to these new ones.

In brief, NAR is a loosely associated group of churches and individuals who find their roots in Pentecostalism and the Latter Rain movement, but who have distinguished themselves from other groups and movements with their belief in modern-day apostles.

It would be easy to simply dismiss NAR as a fringe group that will eventually

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<sup>28</sup>MacArthur, *Strange Fire*, 85.

<sup>29</sup>R. Douglas Geivett and Holly Pivec, *A New Apostolic Reformation? A Biblical Response to a Worldwide Movement* (Wooster, OH: Weaver Book Company, 2014), 3.

fizzle out. But the movement is growing both in size and influence in churches and denominations all over the world. Geivett and Pivec give two major reasons why they believe the movement will not slow down and fade away as previous similar movements have.<sup>30</sup> First, the movement is huge. NAR is “worldwide in scope, with millions of participants.”<sup>31</sup> NAR is promoted by many of the world’s largest and fastest growing churches, including “Redeemed Christian Church of God in Nigeria (more than five million people) and Embassy of the Blessed Kingdom of God for All Nations in Ukraine (twenty thousand people).”<sup>32</sup> The pastor of Redeemed Christian Church in Nigeria has a congregation so large, and a reach so wide, that in 2008 *Newsweek* named him one of the fifty most powerful people in the world.<sup>33</sup> These accounts are not isolated illustrations. Groups of NAR adherents have banded together to form “apostolic networks.” These networks join together and place themselves under the authority or leadership of a single apostle or group of apostles.<sup>34</sup> While there are a good number of these networks that have formed, the largest is Harvest International Ministry, which “claims to encompass more than 20,000 churches in 50 nations.”<sup>35</sup>

The second reason NAR is most likely going to be a long-term influence on the church is that it has developed a significant political influence. During the 2012 presidential election, NAR leaders helped organize a prayer and fasting event called The

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<sup>30</sup>Geivett and Pivec, *A New Apostolic Reformation?*, 9.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., 10.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid.

Response, featuring Texas governor Rick Perry.<sup>36</sup> The group has organized a variety of other national events, and they are not isolated. Many theologians and public figures have been involved in some of these events who may not share the group's beliefs but have nevertheless participate. These include David Barton, Chuck Colson, James Dobson, Mike Huckabee, Richard Land, Tony Perkins, and Alan Sears, among others.<sup>37</sup> This is not to suggest that these men hold to or affirm the apostolic teachings of NAR, but rather to highlight the significant level of influence NAR is beginning to have at a national level. C. Peter Wagner sees the massive growth and influence of the movement as a delightful indicator of divine affirmation.<sup>38</sup>

While it is easy to mentally check a group like NAR off as fringe, it appears to have the size and influence to maintain a presence within the Christian Church for years to come. Even churches that do not accept NAR teachings have been subtly influenced by a slightly repackaged version that often carries the descriptor, "five-fold ministry," referring to a belief in five continuing governmental offices in the church today: apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor, and teacher.<sup>39</sup>

### **Where Did These Teachings Originate?**

"Though called the *New Apostolic Reformation*, the movement's teachings are not really new."<sup>40</sup> Groups attempting to restore the offices of apostle and prophet have sprouted up in various places and at various times in recent church history. While MacArthur traces them all the way back to the false apostles of the New Testament and

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<sup>36</sup>Geivett and Pivec, *A New Apostolic Reformation?*, 14.

<sup>37</sup>*Ibid.*, 16-17.

<sup>38</sup>MacArthur, *Strange Fire*, 88.

<sup>39</sup>Geivett and Pivec, *A New Apostolic Reformation?*, 10.

<sup>40</sup>*Ibid.*, 3.



the papacy of the Middle Ages,<sup>41</sup> it might be of more benefit to look at the origins of the movement within recent church history. The Irvingites of the 1830s, the Apostolic Church of the early 1900s, and the African Independent Churches movement beginning in 1900 are all examples.<sup>42</sup> But the true forerunner of the NAR movement was the Latter Rain movement of the late 1940s.<sup>43</sup> Latter Rain teachings included some unorthodox beliefs, including the belief that “people who received the new apostolic and prophetic revelations could attain a degree of immortality in this life, which would then empower them to usher in God’s kingdom.”<sup>44</sup> After being denounced by the major Pentecostal denominations, the Latter Rain teachings fell by the wayside until they reemerged in the 1980s, largely in independent charismatic churches. These churches were strongly influenced by a new generation of “apostles,” most prominently the “Kansas City Prophets,” which were given prominent platforms for their ministry in the early Vineyard movement under John Wimber.<sup>45</sup> Though this group was largely discredited, many of the leaders and others associated with it would move on and become important players and leaders in what is now known as NAR.<sup>46</sup> While there is some disagreement about the origins of NAR (some adherents deny the connection to Latter Rain teachings), this summary gives the basic background of where the movement comes from.

### **Why Is This a Problem for the Church?**

Significant enough problems exist with the teachings of NAR that pastors and Christians should be warned about the influence and danger of this movement. The first

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<sup>41</sup>MacArthur, *Strange Fire*, 90.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid., 3.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid., 4.

<sup>44</sup>Geivett and Pivec, *A New Apostolic Reformation?*, 4.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid., 5.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid., 6.

major problem is the exclusive claims of the NAR movement. One author argues that in Ephesians 4:11-13, Paul gives a group of grace-gifts that are mandatory for the goal of bringing the church to maturity. In fact, a church that does not recognize the place and authority of modern day apostles “will never reach its intended goal.”<sup>47</sup> This exclusive claim that something that has never been part of orthodox Christianity must indeed be not only a part of church life but an integral part should raise major red flags.

Second, if evangelical Christians will simply take a careful look at Scripture, and evaluate what the criteria was for an apostle, the stark contrast between modern and biblical apostles will be brought forward. In fact, one author goes so far as to claim that “the biblical criteria for apostleship make it impossible for any credible claim to be made that there are still apostles in the church.”<sup>48</sup> He supports this with six biblical arguments.<sup>49</sup> First, the New Testament gives at least three necessary criteria for being an apostle: to be a physical eyewitness of the resurrected Christ (Acts 1:22, 10:39-41; 1 Cor 9:1, 15:7-8); to have been personally appointed by the Lord Jesus Christ (Mark 3:14; Luke 6:13; Acts 1:2, 24; 10:41; Gal 1:1); and to be able to authenticate his appointment with miraculous signs (Matt 10:1-2; Acts 1:5-8, 2:43, 4:33, 5:12, 8:14; 2 Cor 12:12; Heb 2:3-4). Even charismatic theologians such as Wayne Grudem hold that these biblical requirements prohibit any modern-day claims of apostleship. “Since no one today can meet the qualification of having seen the risen Christ with his own eyes, there are no apostles today.”<sup>50</sup>

MacArthur’s second argument is that Paul understood himself to be the last apostle, especially in 1 Corinthians 15:5-9. Third, apostles carried unique authority, that

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<sup>47</sup>David Matthew, *Apostles Today* (West Yorkshire, UK: Harvestime Services, 1988), 38.

<sup>48</sup>MacArthur, *Strange Fire*, 91.

<sup>49</sup>*Ibid.*, 92-100.

<sup>50</sup>Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 911.

if carried over to a modern-day office, would create havoc in churches and bring into serious jeopardy the nature of the canon of Scripture. Fourth, the apostles were foundational to the formation of the church, but that role ceased as the church grew and was established. Fifth, the church quickly transitioned into being led by elders and deacons and based on the requirements given in Titus and Timothy, this was how it was supposed to be. Finally, the apostles were held in a unique position of honor, with their names forever sealed in the wall of New Jerusalem (Rev 21:14).

The weight of evidence in Scripture is significant in demonstrating that the office of apostle ceased with the original twelve. To claim that same authority for today is to grasp at something that Scripture does not allow. To allow someone to speak into the life of a church or a believer with that level of authority creates a dangerous situation that must be battled against within the local church.

This issue was a local church issue for WBC because of the rising popularity of this teaching in the area. Within a three-year period, two NAR churches were established within a five-mile radius of WBC. Both churches were led by apostles who claimed to receive messages from God. The belief systems and practices of these churches needed to be evaluated and compared with the teaching of Scripture.

**An Understanding of What the Bible Teaches  
Concerning the Gospel, Sanctification,  
and Suffering is Needed to  
Combat the Influences of  
Harmful Teaching**

While there is an ever-increasing need for Christians to be taught solid theology in all areas, there are a few specific areas that are prone to get warped when prosperity gospel or NAR teachings enter the equation. First, the gospel begins to be distorted. Second, the nature of sanctification is misconstrued. And third, the nature and purposes of suffering are misrepresented.

## What Exactly Is the Gospel?

Because so many prosperity theology advocates minimize the nature of sin and judgment, the definition of the gospel can become skewed or ambiguous. Michael Horton defines the gospel as “that specific announcement of redemption from sin and death in Jesus Christ, promised and fulfilled in history.”<sup>51</sup> Erickson similarly defines the gospel as “the application of the work of Christ to the lives of humans.”<sup>52</sup> Charles Ryrie adds that “salvation includes the total work of God in bringing people from condemnation to justification, from death to life, from alienation to filiation.”<sup>53</sup> The commonality among these definitions rests in the idea that mankind has a problem and that Jesus Christ accomplished something that when properly applied, remedies that problem. The disagreement with those who minimize the nature of the gospel is in deciding what man’s problem is, what Jesus did to fix it, and what that fix looks like in real life.

Wayne Grudem has done the church a service by putting the nature of the gospel into stark and scriptural terms. Scripture makes the specific facts of salvation clear.<sup>54</sup> First, all people have sinned (Rom 3:23). Second, the penalty for sin is death (Rom 6:23). Third, Jesus Christ died to pay the penalty for sin (Rom 5:8). How does someone respond to the gospel? In repentance and faith. Neither of these can be minimized or left out. Grudem goes so far as to state that “if either the need to repent of sins or the need to trust in Christ for forgiveness is neglected, there is not a full and true proclamation of the gospel.”<sup>55</sup> This is so often where false teachings turn away from truth and in to error. What is the result when either repentance or faith are left out of the gospel? Scripture makes it clear: forgiveness and eternal life are promised to those who

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<sup>51</sup>Michael Horton, *The Christian Faith: A Systematic Theology for Pilgrims on the Way* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 201.

<sup>52</sup>Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998), 902.

<sup>53</sup>Charles C. Ryrie, *Basic Theology* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1999), 319.

<sup>54</sup>Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 694-95.

<sup>55</sup>*Ibid.*

accept Christ (John 3:16; Acts 3:19).<sup>56</sup> These truths must be emphasized again and again from the pulpits and teaching times of churches. If any one aspect of the gospel is compromised, the whole thing falls apart. One final aspect of salvation that must be pointed out is the ultimate purpose of salvation. Too often, the prosperity gospel presents a salvation that is man-centered and focuses on improving the lives of its adherents. But Scripture presents a God who does everything to advance his own glory. One author points out that “it is necessary to consider that the driving purpose for which God saves his people is in accordance with his ultimate purpose for all things – namely, to bring glory and honor to himself.”<sup>57</sup> This is the overarching theological truth behind the salvation of the lost. This concept also influences how believers will see and understand the process of sanctification as well as the concept of human suffering.

### **What Is Sanctification?**

When an individual accepts the atoning work of Jesus Christ and has his sins forgiven, a process begins that is called sanctification. With the basic meaning of “to set apart,”<sup>58</sup> sanctification can be described as “the process of being set apart from sin toward becoming holy and toward the goal of leading a sinless life.”<sup>59</sup> Grudem supplements this by defining sanctification as “a progressive work of God and man that makes us more and more free from sin and like Christ in our actual lives.”<sup>60</sup> Sanctification is a process that increases throughout life, and is not complete until a believer dies (2 Cor 3:18).<sup>61</sup>

Here it would be helpful to include a word about the nature of the

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<sup>56</sup>Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 694-95.

<sup>57</sup>John MacArthur and Richard Mayhue, eds., *Biblical Doctrine* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017), 486.

<sup>58</sup>Ryrie, *Basic Theology*, 442.

<sup>59</sup>Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 979.

<sup>60</sup>Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 746.

<sup>61</sup>*Ibid.*, 749.

sanctification process. Sanctification is something that is primarily a work that God does in His people. Philippians 2:13 reads, “For it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.” As Christians grow, it is important to remember that both the will and the ability to work ultimately come from God. But as Grudem points out (and contrary to many who advocate for a “let go and let God” mentality), believers play both an active and passive role in the sanctification process. The role is a “passive one in which we depend on God to sanctify us, and an active one in which we strive to obey God and take steps that will increase our sanctification.”<sup>62</sup> How do believers live out their role in this process? No shortcuts or “secrets” are available, but rather the time-tested and biblical means of “Bible reading and meditation (Ps. 1:2; Matt. 4:4; John 17:17), prayer (Eph. 6:18; Phil. 4:6), worship (Eph. 5:18-20), witnessing (Matt. 28:19-20), Christian fellowship (Heb. 10:24-25), and self-discipline or self-control (Gal. 5:23; Titus 1:8).”<sup>63</sup>

Unfortunately, many within the prosperity theology movement associate sanctification with a lack of suffering or a freedom from physical ailments and maladies. Christians need to have a biblical understanding of what sanctification is so that they have accurate expectations of God’s role and their role in the process. From here, it is important to also understand the role that suffering plays in the life of the believer.

### **Why Do Christians Suffer?**

Martin Luther believed that suffering was a prerequisite for good theology.<sup>64</sup> But this creates friction with much of modern practice, which goes to great pains to avoid suffering of any kind. It even runs contrary to many of the beliefs that existed among the cultures of the people in Scripture, who would view the predominant cause of suffering in the life of a person to be some sin or personal failing. For centuries, Christians have

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<sup>62</sup>Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 754.

<sup>63</sup>Ibid., 755.

<sup>64</sup>Horton, *The Christian Faith*, 97.

struggled with this question of why people who have placed their faith and trust in Christ continue to suffer. Answers have varied, from the orthodox to the heretical, with the result that some see suffering as something to be embraced, while others view any kind of discomfort as something to be avoided at all costs. In fact, “a main attraction of prosperity theology is its message concerning the avoidance or alleviation of suffering.”<sup>65</sup>

Scripture gives a clear theology of suffering that appears to run contrary to what the prosperity gospel advocates propose. Scripture is full of righteous people who suffered: Jacob, Joseph, Job, the Old Testament prophets, Jesus, and the disciples are simply a small sample of the people in Scripture who endured suffering. Moving beyond examples, Scripture makes clear statements that “all presume suffering to be a regular part of the Christian life.”<sup>66</sup> Texts would include Philippians 1:29, 2 Timothy 3:12, and 1 Peter 2:21. That leads to the question of where suffering comes from. David Jones gives three sources of suffering in this world: “the curse on the created order, personal sin, and the sins of others.”<sup>67</sup> The fact is that in a world in which there is sin, there will also be suffering.

Knowing where suffering comes from and why it is part of this world system is helpful and leads directly to the main question under discussion. Why does a good God still allow his people to suffer? Grudem gives three main reasons why Christians suffer.<sup>68</sup> First, believers suffer because they live in a sinful and fallen world. Second, believers sometimes suffer because God is disciplining them. Third, believers sometimes suffer because God is strengthening them (Heb 2:18). This is important for believers to understand because the priority in suffering is not to pray for its removal. Instead,

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<sup>65</sup>Jones and Woodbridge, *Health, Wealth & Happiness*, 107.

<sup>66</sup>Ibid., 109.

<sup>67</sup>Ibid., 115.

<sup>68</sup>Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 811.

Christians should be encouraged to pray for the coming of Christ, when all things will be made right (in the first instance), to repent and turn from sin (in the second instance), and to pray for insight into how they should learn and grow through the suffering (in the third instance). The important thing to remember amid any kind of suffering is that God is in control, and that he is working circumstances out for his glory and plan.



## CHAPTER 4

### DETAILS AND DESCRIPTION OF THE PROJECT

This ministry project required twenty-nine weeks, with the implementation being divided into three stages.

#### **Stage 1: Preparation and Development**

Over the first five weeks of the project, an initial survey was done regarding the specific doctrinal topics to be covered. Because of the limitation of time, hard decisions had to be made about how much time to spend on each doctrinal topic. Once the initial survey was done, a schedule of sermons was developed and rough outlines for each sermon were put together. During this time, the T-test for dependent samples was distributed to fifteen members of the congregation. This survey was based on a Likert scale and contained basic doctrinal questions. This helped evaluate the basic theological understanding of the members of the congregation. Upon receiving the survey, the member had the option of using a last name or a 4-digit PIN number in order to match pre- and post-surveys. All surveys had to be returned one week prior to the beginning of the sermon series. This eliminated the possibility of the first few weeks of the sermon series having any effect on the survey results.

#### **Stage 2: Implementation of the Sermon Series**

Following the five weeks of planning and studying, the twenty-week sermon series was delivered from the pulpit of Washington Baptist Church during the Sunday morning services.

## **Week 1: The Bible**

The sermon series began with the importance of the Bible in the lives of God's people. An overview of the history of revelation was given, beginning with the prophets and culminating with the fact that in the New Testament, God has spoken through his Son (Heb 1:1-3). This sermon covered the claim that the Bible is the inerrant and infallible Word of God (2 Tim 3:16; 2 Pet 1:20-21). The Scriptures are also authoritative, as well as sufficient for faith and practice. A natural question that arises at this point of the discussion is whether believers can trust the Bible they possess. The preservation of the Scriptures was covered, followed by practical ways of implementing the truth of Scripture into the daily lives of the congregation.

## **Weeks 2 through 4: God**

Scripture is the believer's only reliable source of truth about God. The logical next study was God himself. This subject took three weeks to cover. In week two, the question of whether God can truly be known was addressed. God exists and inhabits heaven. Scripture assumes this and never seeks to prove it. God reveals himself in Scripture as One who is completely knowable, but also utterly incomprehensible. This sermon then moved into a survey of one of the ways God has revealed himself in Scripture: His names. Scripture uses the names of God to reflect on the different attributes and characteristics that God possesses in ways that simply listing the attributes cannot communicate.

The perfections of God were addressed in week 3. God has some attributes that belong to him alone. He is infinite and immutable. He is omniscient and omnipotent. These (among other attributes) cannot be "communicated" to mankind. On the other hand, there are attributes of God that he shares with his creatures. Wisdom, truth, and faithfulness are all things that characterize God, but that he also wants mankind to evidence towards each other as part of their status as "image bearers." Believers develop and manifest these attributes as signs of spiritual growth. Practical application was made

from these truths regarding the importance of Christians knowing God. Christians need to develop a picture of God formed by the revealed truth of Scripture, not by mankind.

In week 4, the Trinity was addressed. Confusion exists within the evangelical world concerning the nature of the Trinity. Scripture presents some clear truths about God. First, there is only one God (Deut 6:4). Second, this one God is presented in three persons: the Father (John 6:27), the Son (Matt 1:23), and the Holy Spirit (Acts 5:3-4). This sermon was a practical study, moving quickly into major questions people have about God such as the problem of evil and how God's sovereignty fits in with free will. The message closed with twenty biblical commands urging believers to live in light of the nature of God.

### **Weeks 5 and 6: Jesus**

The study of Jesus took two weeks, with the first week focusing on the pre-existence of Christ and the significance of his birth. Jesus existed with the Father for eternity past (John 1:1) and was active in the Old Testament, including appearances as the Angel of the Lord. Of great importance is the fact that the birth of Christ was prophesied throughout the Old Testament. This is important for Christians to grasp because it shows that the plan of redemption has been interwoven into human history. The entire Old Testament pointed forward to the moment when God would send his Son to earth. This raised questions that needed to be answered, so the sermon moved into addressing the deity of Christ, the humanity of Christ, and the virgin birth.

In week 6, the sermon dealt with the life of Christ in as much detail as time allowed. Jesus was the master-teacher, interweaving incredible teaching methods with powerful and authoritative content. He was the miracle-worker, who did incredible feats that demonstrated his deity and his authority. But despite all of this, he allowed himself to be arrested and tried in humiliating fashion, and then to be brutally executed. This death was a substitution in which the Son of God died in the place of fallen humanity. The

sermon finished by briefly covering the resurrection and glorification of the Son.

### **Weeks 7 and 8: The Holy Spirit**

The nature and work of the Holy Spirit is a subject that has been dominated by error and confusion for centuries. Two weeks is not a long enough period for a church to work through every issue surrounding the Holy Spirit and his work. However, a solid foundation can be laid. In week 7, I dealt with the nature of the Holy Spirit. Too often, the third member of the Trinity is relegated to the role of an impersonal guiding influence (such as the force in *Star Wars*). On the other hand, some people treat the Holy Spirit as if he is the only member of the Trinity at work in the world today. Scripture presents the Holy Spirit as a person. Because the Holy Spirit is such a hard concept for many to wrap their minds around, Scripture uses various pictures to help the human mind comprehend aspects of his nature. The Holy Spirit is described as a dove, as oil, as a pledge, a fire, a seal, water, and wind, among other things. Amid these pictures, Scripture clearly teaches that the Holy Spirit is God, not some second-class member of the Trinity. This message also touched briefly on the role of the Holy Spirit in salvation and sanctification. The Holy Spirit is the One who regenerates new believers (Titus 3:5). He also baptizes and seals believers into the Body of Christ (1 Cor 12:13). As part of the sanctification process, the Holy Spirit also indwells every believer, giving each one a powerful weapon in waging spiritual warfare and in growing in Christlikeness.

Week 8 moved into detail about the sanctification process. At conversion, every Christian receives the indwelling Holy Spirit (Rom 8:9). This Spirit provides empowerment for godly living, but the control of the Spirit is something that believers must submit to and surrender to willingly. A close examination of Ephesians 5:18-20 reveals that the filling of the Spirit is commanded (Eph 5:19), but has conditions placed on it (Eph 4:30; 5:15). Believers need to keep themselves in close relationship with Christ and be positioned in a submissive stance toward the leading of the Holy Spirit. The filling

of the Spirit is confirmed in how believers live (Eph 5:19-6:9). One of the ways in which the work of the Holy Spirit is manifested in the lives of believers is through displaying the fruit of the Spirit. In Galatians chapter five, Paul gives several manifestations, or evidences, of the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of a believer. These fruits include love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. This leads naturally into another way the Holy Spirit empowers Christians: by giving each believer spiritual gifts. Several passages of Scripture, including Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 12-13, and 1 Peter 4 all give lists of different ways that the Holy Spirit equips believers for service within the body of Christ. The sermon closed with a brief touch on the concept of illumination. The Holy Spirit not only manifests himself in the fruit of the Spirit and by giving spiritual gifts to believers but also by opening the eyes of believers to the truths of Scripture, while helping make personal application.

### **Week 9: Man and the Image of God**

People have been asking questions about their existence for centuries. Reasons for existence and purpose have been desperately sought after, and yet the basic and fundamental answers to these questions are found in Scripture and are directly tied to the creation of man. This is an immensely practical theological concept because it speaks to many issues that are facing believers today. Issues of homosexuality, transgenderism, abortion, euthanasia, and many of the modern philosophies concerning humanity all find their answers in Scripture.

Scripture begins by establishing that Adam was a real man who was created by God as taught in Genesis 1-2. This creation was done “in the image of God.” While there is debate over exactly what this means, at its core lies the fact that man is the crown of God’s creation and bears his image and likeness in a way that other created beings do not. Once the creation and purpose of man is nailed down from the Bible, application can be made to some significant contemporary issues. God’s creative purposes clarify the

modern questions that surround gender and homosexuality. It also speaks with clarity to the issue of personhood. The preciousness and value of human life is rooted directly in the purpose and nature of creation. The personhood of man also speaks directly to the issues of race and ethnicity that are common struggles in our culture. The nature and purpose of human government can also be addressed. Of all the sermons in this series, this one more than any other built an incredibly important foundation for dealing with modern practical issues that face Christians.

### **Week 10: The Devastating Impact of Sin**

Sin is a concept that is not popular within American culture today. Even many churches and Christians shy away from mentioning the word, preferring something gentler like “mistakes.” Yet Scripture makes it clear that while man is created in the image of God, sin has marred that image and created an incredibly serious problem for mankind.

To understand sin, one must be able to define it, and the best place to define the concept of sin is from Scripture. Scripture describes sin as “ungodliness and unrighteousness” (Rom 1:18). John MacArthur defines sin as “any lack of conformity to God’s will in attitude, thought, or action, whether committed actively or passively. The center of all sin is autonomy, which is the replacing of God with self. Always closely associated with sin are its products-- pride, selfishness, idolatry, and lack of peace (shalom).”<sup>1</sup> So sin is a big deal, but where did it come from? In Genesis 3, Adam, as the representative head of humanity, disobeys God and sins, thereby plunging all of mankind into sin with him.

From the definition and origin of sin, an explanation of the consequences of sin

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<sup>1</sup>John MacArthur and Richard Mayhue, eds., *Biblical Doctrine* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017), 454.

must follow. Sin brings death, both physical and spiritual (Gen 3:19; Heb 9:27; Rev 20:11-15). Sin also brings personal consequences such as the tendency to blame others for one's sin (Gen 3:12), the experience of guilt and shame over sin (Gen 3:7), as well as fear (Gen 3:10). Sin also leads to damaged relationships with God, other people, and creation.

This discussion about sin led into a brief explanation of original sin. This was followed by an overview of the gospel, which gives the ultimate solution to the problem of sin. Some commonly asked questions were then addressed, such as whether some sins are worse than others and whether there are mortal and venial sins.

### **Weeks 11 through 14: Salvation**

The study of sin naturally laid the foundation for the introduction of salvation. Four weeks were needed for this section because it is an area where there are many questions and distortions. In week 11, I addressed the question of election and how it fits into the plan of salvation. After a brief discussion of the purpose of salvation, I walked through an in-depth study of the concept of election. Each of the applicable texts were looked at closely and sensitive questions surrounding the concept of election were answered. This served to deal up front with one of the most divisive issues surrounding the biblical teaching of salvation.

In week 12, the deep truth of substitutionary atonement was covered. God is perfectly righteous, and man is terribly sinful (Matt 5:48; 1 John 1:5). Since man cannot do anything to reconcile himself to God (Rom 8:7-8), anything done to reconcile man to God must begin with God. Fortunately, while God's justice demands that payment be made for sin (1 Pet 2:24), his love drove him to make that payment himself (John 3:16). So in Christ two provisions are made. First, Christ is the spotless lamb of God who is offered up in man's place as a substitutionary sacrifice (1 Cor 15:22, 45). Second, his perfect obedience makes a provision of positive righteousness for mankind (Rom 5:19).

The focus here though, was on the death of Christ. In the atonement, Christ satisfied the wrath of God and reconciled man to God by paying the debt of sin that mankind bore. The sermon finished by showing how the entire Old Testament sacrificial system pointed forward to the sacrificial death of Christ. The author of Hebrews states that Christ's sacrifice was sufficient in that it was once-for-all and will never have to be repeated (Heb 7:26-28; 9:11-12, 25-28; 10:10-14).

Week 13 was a practical call to Christians to reflect on the power of proclamation. The church has been entrusted with the gospel and has been given the mission of proclaiming that gospel to the world. Romans 10:13-17 was the primary text, with emphasis placed on the need to call the lost to respond to the gospel. I dealt in detail with the process of conversion while giving careful explanation concerning the elements of faith and repentance. Because the need for repentance is left out of many gospel presentations, this was an important emphasis. When an individual genuinely repents and turns to Christ in faith, he becomes a new person (Eph 2:4-5). This process results in a new way of living.

Week 14 dealt with the spiritual blessings of salvation. The first blessing of salvation is union with Christ (Eph 1:3). The second blessing of salvation is justification, or the declaration of righteousness based on the work of Christ. The third blessing of salvation is adoption, or how God brings fallen men and women into familial relationship with himself (Eph 1:4-6). Adoption results in incredible privileges for the child of God. The child of God receives the indwelling Holy Spirit (Gal 4:6-7) and the privilege of approaching God in prayer (Matt 6:9). He also receives the privilege of fatherly discipline (Heb 12:5-6) and a promised future inheritance with Christ (Rom 8:17; 1 Pet 1:4). One of the most practical aspects of adoption into the family of God is that the believer gets placed on the path of progressive sanctification. This was the focus of the rest of the sermon, with a strong emphasis placed on the nature of sanctification and the role that the spiritual disciplines of Scripture reading, meditation, prayer, and worship play in that



process. The message closed with the reminder that in the daily struggles of spiritual growth, God has promised to preserve his people (Phil 1:6) and to one day glorify them (1 Cor 15:51-53).

### **Weeks 15 and 16: Angels and Demons**

Week 15 was important to this study because of the cultural obsession with the supernatural that exists in the world today. Angels are real, and they exist as ministering spirits (1 Tim 5:21). But how angels work and what they do must be taken from Scripture, not from other sources. Only a few angels are named in Scripture (the Archangel Michael and Gabriel), but there are numerous types of angels in existence. Cherubim seem to exist to protect and guard (Gen 3:24), while the seraphim are not given much of a description other than that they are the “burning ones” (Isa 6:1-6). What is known about angels as far as their character is that those who did not fall are called “holy ones” (Jude 14). This marks them as beings separated from sin and dedicated to God’s use and service. They also have a military function, making up the “hosts” of heaven (Ps 33:6). They also minister to God’s people in accordance with his will (Heb 1:14). Other ministries include worship and praise (Is 6:1-4), serving as messengers of God (Dan 8:16), instruments of judgment (Gen 19:1), and as heralds of good news (Luke 2:8-15).

While the texts that speak about angels bring comfort and joy to believers, there is a dark side to this subject. The portion of the sermon dealing with demons started with Satan himself and then used his attributes to characterize all the demonic realm. A balance must be found here. Too often, conservative Christians live as if Satan is nothing more than a mythical character used to scare children into obeying. On the other side, some Christians treat every problem they have as if it is something related to the demonic realm.

The biblical study of Satan and demons began with the names and character of the devil. He is called Apollyon, or the destroyer (Rev 9:11). This gives a huge insight

into how Scripture sees his role and purpose. Satan is not simply an evil influence. He wants to ruin and destroy all that is good and right in the world. He is also called the accuser (Rev 12:10) and the adversary (1 Pet 5:8) which give insight into his attitude toward believers. He is also called the “evil one” (1 John 5:19) and the “father of lies” (John 8:44). Probably the most important (and most used) name for the devil is simply “Satan.” This term sets Satan as the adversary and enemy of God and all who follow him. Christians need to understand that they have an enemy who will not rest until their lives are destroyed.

This sermon concluded with a brief overview of Satan’s strategies in attacking believers. He works at distorting God’s Word by convincing believers that certain aspects of Scripture are negotiable and can be reinterpreted to match cultural norms. He seeks to discredit God’s people through scandal and hypocrisy. Finally, he seeks to destroy the believer’s enthusiasm for God’s work through discouragement and distraction. The believer’s weaponry in this battle is found in Ephesians 6:10-20, a text which was unpacked in the next sermon.

In week 16, the sermon focused on Ephesians 6 and putting on the armor of God. Believers do have a defense against the attacks of the devil. God has not left his people helpless in the face of evil. The bulk of this message walked through the elements of the armor, unpacking the significance and use of each one. Special emphasis was given to the need to get the gospel right and to have a strong prayer life. From there, the message moved on to some of the big questions that often surround the biblical teachings on angels and demons. Are there guardian angels? Should angels be worshiped? Do believers have to be worried about angels showing up at their houses? Do churches have angels? Will Christians really judge angels? Can Satan read a person’s mind? Can believers be possessed by demons? These were addressed, with a closing application made that the believer’s primary concern is arming himself spiritually for the warfare that he faces each day.

## **Weeks 17 and 18: The Church**

A wave of spirituality is sweeping the United States. This would be a good thing if it was a spirituality rooted in the gospel, but it is instead a spirituality not tied to any objective body of doctrine or rooted in any faith tradition. Some of this has permeated the lives of professing believers. Many Christians claim to be saved but are not part of a local body of believers. Is this viable? Can Jesus save people for heaven, but not to be part of his earthly body? The purpose of week 17's message was to demonstrate that the church plays a vital role in the sanctification and development of the people of God.

An understanding of the church begins with the nature and origin of the church. The word "church" comes from a word meaning "those who are called out." While it could be used in secular society of any group of people called out for a specific purpose, in the New Testament the word points to that specific group of people who are called out by God from bondage to sin and to freedom in Jesus Christ. The sermon then looked closely at Matthew 16:18, and the design that Christ gave for his church. The promises in this verse are not given to individuals, but to the body of Christ manifested in the local church. The second movement of the sermon dealt with the importance of the visible church seeking to reflect the invisible as closely as possible. This was important because it laid the groundwork for explaining the need for accurate church rolls and for having a clear process for verifying the profession of faith of potential members. The third movement explained the distinction found in Scripture between the church and Israel. This was a practical point for the congregation in that it helped the members understand why promises given directly to Israel cannot be uprooted and applied to the church (or to the United States). The fourth movement unpacked three of the metaphors that Scripture uses to describe the church: a bride (2 Cor 11:2), a body (Rom 12:4-5), and a building (Heb 4:14-16).

Once the design of the church is understood, the purposes of the church can be unpacked. The church's primary purpose is to bring glory to God (1 Pet 4:11). This phrase has become trite and overused in many evangelical circles, but it is an important foundation upon which to build a doctrine of the church. If the church does not keep the glory of God central in its purpose, there will be a tendency to sacrifice biblical truth on the altar of pragmatism. A secondary purpose for the church is the edification and discipleship of believers (1 Cor 14:26). This must be emphasized, as the church provides a means of growth in the lives of believers. This growth occurs through the ministry of the Word, the mentorship of biblical leadership, the opportunity to practice spiritual gifts, and the opportunity to practice the "one anothers" that are found throughout Scripture. Another purpose of the church is evangelism (Matt 28:16-20). The gospel must reach the lost, and God has chosen the church as his tool in accomplishing this.

Along with the design and the purpose of the church goes the biblical leadership of the church. Christ is the supreme authority over the church. His commands must be obeyed, and accountability to his authority must be understood. Under that authority, Christ provides elders who give spiritual oversight to the local church and deacons who provide practical service to the church. These offices must be understood from a biblical perspective as far as qualifications and function if each local church is going to thrive.

In week 18, Acts 2:41-47 was the primary text. The first movement of the message centered around the need for devoted people in the church. The different aspects of this devotion in Acts 2 were pointed out: devotion to Christ, to Scripture, to one another, and to prayer. The second movement dealt with the church's function as a means of sanctification in the lives of believers. Sanctification is accomplished through the ministry of God's Word (2 Tim 3:16-17) and through public identification with Christ in baptism (1 Pet 2:1-3). The church also helps sanctify believers through the Lord's table (1 Cor 11:23-26), corporate prayer (1 Thess 5:17), corporate worship, and fellowship.

This message finished with an explanation of why many churches believe it is important to have an official church membership, with application made regarding the need for believers to not only be devoted to Christ, but to his church as well.

### **Week 19: The Future**

History has a storyline. Creation, the fall, and redemption have all come to pass. Now all of creation awaits the restoration of all things. In most stories, the reader does not want to know the ending before he reads the book. However, in the story of history, God gives his people an incredible blessing: he tells them how it all ends, and why they can draw a tremendous amount of hope and joy from that knowledge.

This sermon began by explaining the future at a personal level. Every person on earth needs to understand that he or she will die one day and be judged (Heb 9:27). Those who have accepted Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior enter the presence of God (2 Cor 5:8). Those who reject Christ go to Hades (Luke 16). Further, a day will come when everyone will be resurrected (John 5:28-29). Believers will receive a glorified body in Heaven (1 Cor 15:35-49), while unbelievers will spend eternity in the Lake of Fire (Rev 14:9-11). Time was spent explaining the nature of Hell, as well as the attempts of some to deny a literal place of eternal torment.

The second movement of this sermon explained the future at a cosmic level. Washington Baptist holds to a premillennial and pretribulational position on eschatology. This was explained beginning with the “70 weeks” of Daniel 9:24-27, then moved on to explain the nature of the rapture, the tribulation, and the second coming. Special emphasis was placed on the second coming because it is the one aspect of eschatology that is not sincerely debated. The second coming leads to the eternal state, with application being made on how a study of future things can be used in the life of a Christian to give hope and security in the future.

## **Week 20: Two Challenges Facing the Modern Church**

The last sermon was more applicational in nature. Early in the study process, two major theological issues were identified as being problems in the communities that WBC serves. This sermon dealt with those two issues. The first major challenge facing the church is the prosperity gospel. Two major proponents of prosperity theology whose works are well known were identified (Joel Osteen and Joyce Meyer). The premise of the point was supported with statistics showing the huge growth of the prosperity theology movement around the world. Problems with the movement were then identified, beginning with theological problems and then moving on to practical problems.

The second major challenge facing the church is the New Apostolic Reformation. This is another theological movement growing rapidly around the world. Again, statistics were given to show the massive influence of the movement, including within the political world of the United States. Specific problems were then identified, especially the emphasis on modern-day apostleship in comparison with the biblical teachings on apostles.

In a closing movement, three strategies were given to combat the false teachings that often spring up in churches. First, Churches must get the gospel right. If the gospel is right, error will have a hard time creeping in. Second, churches must get sanctification right. Third, the church must get suffering right, as so much of prosperity theology is tied to material success and freedom from suffering.

## CHAPTER 5

### EVALUATION OF THE PROJECT

The teaching of doctrine to the select group of median adults made a statistically significant difference resulting in the increase of their doctrinal knowledge. This result fulfilled the main goal and purpose of the project. Through this project, I learned an incredible amount about both the congregation I served and myself. I have the interesting perspective of having spent the last three months serving a different congregation than the one I served during this project. Being among a different group of believers has helped me put into context the strengths and weaknesses of WBC.

I was challenged by the blind spots and gaps in the doctrinal understanding of the congregation. Certain sections of the pre-surveys were solid almost across the board, while some sections were wildly inconsistent. I was excited to see some of those areas of weakness stabilize after the sermon series and to see a strong desire on the part of several within the congregation to learn basic theology and how it applies to their daily lives. I was also happy with how the results of the surveys allowed me to tailor the content of the sermons. Because of the time constraints of this type of series, I had to be selective. For instance, the church members scored very highly in their understanding of the issues surrounding speaking in tongues and other sign gifts. Because of this, I did not have to spend a lot of time on this issue while preaching. Another area was the gospel itself. The results showed that the vast majority of membership could give a clear gospel explanation. Their weakness was having confidence in sharing that gospel with someone else. This greatly affected how I presented the gospel in the sermon series.

I was challenged and stretched by the sermon series itself. My normal practice

is to preach through books of the Bible, or at least portions of books. Topical studies are a struggle. I was also taking material that I would normally use for Sunday School and turning it into expository sermons. Through this process I gained an appreciation for just how applicational basic theology can be and how important good theology is to daily living.

This project also had a humbling component. I was convicted about some of the assumptions I had made about the congregation at WBC. First, I had serious doubts that the congregation could handle doctrinal teaching. I was concerned that the sermon series would turn into a monotonous experience for both the congregation and myself. I moved forward with the project because I strongly believed that it met one of the greatest needs of the congregation. I was humbled by the response of many throughout the series. They were engaged and responsive and seemed to truly grasp the concepts being taught. Second, I had doubts that the congregation really cared about theology. I had heard comments about theology being for Bible college classrooms from several members of the church. I was pleasantly surprised by how the Holy Spirit worked in the lives of the people. By the middle of the series, I felt a tangible shift in the general attitude among many toward the importance of good theology.

### **Evaluation of the Project's Purpose**

The purpose of this project was to equip the members of Washington Baptist Church with the foundations of Christian doctrine for the health of the church and the advancement of the gospel. Looking back, WBC was a ministry setting that required multiple projects with multiple purposes. This project was a great place to start since it dealt with the most pressing need the church faced. Too often, people look at churches and assess only the symptoms, without dealing with the real problems. For example, a church may be shrinking because it is not active in evangelism in the community. Rather than address the symptom (“you need to evangelize more”), church leaders need to



address the root problem. Is the church weak in evangelism because the members simply don't know how to share the gospel? Or do they not care enough about their neighbors? Maybe they fail to understand the seriousness of the great commission? Or maybe they are afraid of rejection. At WBC, there was a general failure to put belief into practice. Many different symptoms could have been addressed. But at the core of these symptoms was a congregation with a distorted picture of God.

Much of this analysis was confirmed when I evaluated the results of the pre-tests. Most questions directly related to the gospel were returned with high scores. The two highest-scored questions were "there is only one God" (90 out of 90 potential points) and "there is a chance that someone who does lots of good things in his life will make it to heaven even if he doesn't accept Christ as his Lord and Savior" (90 out of 90 potential points).

I was pleasantly surprised by some of the responses I found on the pre-test on questions not directly related to the gospel. On the question of whether it is possible that God will speak again and add new books to the Bible, the pre-test returned results of 89 out of 90. This reflected a strong understanding of the completion of the canon. This result also helped define my task more clearly. The church was strong on their belief in the completed canon of Scripture, but also possessed an emotional attachment to the concept of "hearing from God" through means not involving Scripture.

Another surprising area was the participants' understanding of suffering. Question 10 stated "I believe that God can help His people grow through their experience of suffering and trials." This returned 88 out of 90 potential points. This again showed that there was a general understanding among the congregation of the sovereignty of God in their daily lives, but teaching was needed to bring a consistent perspective.

The pre-tests also confirmed some of the doctrinal confusion that I believed plagued WBC. The lowest score on the survey was a poorly worded question that I did not rely heavily on in my analysis. However, several others stood out. While the

members were strong on the completion of the canon, they were weak on the topic of ongoing revelation from God (67 out of 90), and whether the revelation of Scripture is required for someone to know the good news of salvation (64 out of 90). I believe that these results, combined with a question about the need for apostles in the church today along the same lines as Peter and Paul (65 out of 90), reinforced the belief that the basic teachings of the New Apostolic Reformation have had an impact or could have an impact on the members of WBC.

Other areas of weakness in the church would open the door to prosperity theology. First, while most participants could clearly state the gospel, few expressed confidence in their ability to articulate the gospel and lead someone to salvation (66 out of 90). Second, many struggled with clarity on the source of man's sin problem. The statement "man's main problem is self-image or self-esteem" received only 67 out of 90, and the statement "most sin problems are related to demonic attack" received 64 out of 90. These answers confirmed a problem that is common to all of us, and that is the refusal to accept personal responsibility for one's own sin. People will look for anything or anyone to blame for their own shortcomings. At WBC, this was a problem that manifested itself at the level of the congregation. When shortcomings of the church were addressed, people would often make comments in private that would place the blame for the issues on the shoulders of the "church," while not including themselves in that group. Members struggled to take on personal responsibility for the weaknesses of the church. Without a willingness to personally change and repent, most problems in the church were talked about, but little was ever done to address and correct issues.

These results confirmed that the purpose of the project was sound and that the path forward was needed to move WBC toward a healthy understanding of basic Bible doctrine.

## **Evaluation of the Project's Goals**

This project had three goals. The first goal was to assess the current doctrinal knowledge of the membership of Washington Baptist Church. This evaluation was accomplished through the pre-test doctrinal survey. Trying to create a tool that will assess doctrinal knowledge among a group of people is incredibly challenging. The survey had to be comprehensive enough to be useful, but short enough that people would take the time to fill it out. I ended up with a thirty-two-question survey. I scrapped a lot of potential questions throughout the process. After working and revising, I felt that the final product would be useful in accomplishing its purpose. The second goal was to develop a twenty-week sermon series on the core doctrines of the faith. This was the goal that required the most work and planning. Fitting the content into twenty weeks was a challenge, and I considered a longer series. Ultimately, the twenty-week cap was a necessary limitation. I spent time sketching out sermon outlines and a schedule for the entire series, trying to place appropriate emphasis where it was needed. In hindsight, this was a solid goal. A twenty-week period was long enough to meet the needs of the project but short enough to limit the natural fatigue that comes with a long sermon series. Ideally, the project would have been complemented with a small group curriculum, but there was no way to make that work within the constraints of the project. I had to decide between a smaller sample size (those who attended both morning worship services and small group) with greater interaction or a larger sample size (those who attended morning worship services consistently) with less ability to interact. I decided on working with a larger portion of the congregation (about thirty-three percent). The third goal was to equip the members of WBC with the core doctrines upon which our church rests through the twenty-week sermon series. I ended up dividing the twenty weeks into ten doctrinal topics with a final applicational message. Despite having areas that we could have spent more time on, this was a good goal that advanced the purpose of the project.

## **Strengths of the Project**

One of the biggest strengths of this project was the level of participation. My goal was to get twenty people who would complete both pre- and post-surveys and be present for all sermons. The final number was fifteen, but for a church of 45, this was a good percentage to work with. Thirty-three percent of the congregation was a great sample size to work with and really helped me get a good number of pre-test surveys to analyze as I prepared the material for the project. This level of participation was only possible because the project was done in a sermon format instead of a Bible study or Sunday School format. I believe that this vindicated the decision to only do sermons instead of a sermon and small group curriculum. It would have been helpful to have had a small group Bible study at the same time, but that would have limited the level of participation.

Another strength was the subject matter. Most members of WBC had never been through any kind of systematic study of Bible doctrines. There had been some Sunday School material that touched on aspects of doctrine here and there, but never a comprehensive study in a format like this project presented. This project gave the congregation the opportunity to study the faith systematically and to see how each doctrine ties in with other doctrines. The doctrine of God leads into the doctrine of man, which leads into the doctrine of sin, which leads into the doctrine of salvation. Eschatology makes more sense when it is placed into the context of all of theology and all of redemptive history.

A third strength was that the project dealt with real issues. A complaint that I heard several times over my first few years at WBC was that theology was dry, boring, and had no practical bearing on real life. In each sermon, I tried to bring up real and practical questions that people would have about the issues that were being discussed. I did not want this series to be an abstract theological study, but a group of sermons that gave the people a bigger and clearer picture of God. I then wanted to demonstrate how

that picture related to their everyday lives. For example, how a person views God will directly impact how he responds to the commands of God. How a woman sees the sovereignty and goodness of God will directly impact how she loves a husband who is not particularly engaged in the relationship. How well a man grasps the purpose of the marriage relationship will often directly relate to the care he takes in guarding his own marriage. Most people in the church had never viewed theology as something that directly related to their lives. It was a joy to see that false notion slowly change.

A fourth strength was that the series was application-driven. My goal was not just to educate the minds of the people but to challenge their hearts. Questions were raised and answered. I immediately knew that not having an opportunity for questions and answers (such as a small group study) would be a challenge, so I created an opportunity for feedback. For each week of the series, forms were in the bulletins with a tear-off sheet for questions that arose during the sermon. I took these questions each week and addressed them at the beginning of the next week's sermon. For one week, because of the subject matter (election and predestination), we took a Sunday School period to answer questions and work through the issue. This time spent in discussion was vitally important because there were so many questions that were asked and answered. This time was also helpful to me because it gave me the opportunity to address some unbiblical lines of thought that people had picked up along the way. I also had a chance to see how well the material I was covering in the sermons was being digested by those within the congregation. I also worked hard to bring up relevant points of application from each doctrinal topic. This showed the members how each area of theology was directly applicable to daily life.

A final strength of the project was the result. With the mean result on the pre- and post-surveys going up about ten points, it seems that the project helped stabilize the doctrinal understanding of the congregation. Marked improvement was seen in the answers to all the questions that were on the low end of the spectrum from the pre-test to

the post-test. This result was greatly encouraging. On the question about God giving continued revelation to his people the score rose from 67 to 82. The question about modern-day apostles had its score rise from 65 to 83. Members' confidence in their ability to articulate the gospel rose from 66 to 78, and the answer to the question about whether man's main problem is self-image or self-esteem rose from 67 to 83. These results were reflections on the effectiveness of the curriculum and on the comprehension of the participants. As we worked through the practical application, things seemed to click with many in the congregation. Members of the church were beginning to understand the direct relationship between their theology and their everyday lives. Of all the strengths of the project, this was by far the most exciting. It revealed that people in the church were understanding what was being taught and were making application to their own belief system.

### **Weaknesses of the Project**

All projects have weaknesses, and this one was no different. The greatest weakness was the fact that I used a sermon series instead of a Bible study format. The sermon series attained the level of congregational participation that I wanted but limited my ability to interact with the members as we went through each issue. A Bible study would have allowed a more natural flow in the subject matter from week to week. Also, a sermon does not allow for questions to be asked as the study progresses. Even though forms were provided every week for questions to be asked, I realized that not everyone who would have asked a question during a Bible study would take the time to write their questions down and submit them. This was a weakness, but it was a necessary one given all other limitations.

A second weakness was the time constraints of the study. This project was a mammoth undertaking. When I went to Bible college, basic theology classes were divided into four semesters of 15-20 weeks each, meeting multiple times per week and

having hundreds of pages of reading in between. This study was twenty weeks of forty-minute sermons with no preparation or work in between. Every week, I had to make decisions about how much to include and how much to cut. Ideally, more sermons would have been added. Forty weeks would probably have been ideal, and had this been a Sunday School project, that is probably the route I would have gone. For the WBC context, a sermon series, especially of a doctrinal nature, would have lost effectiveness after twenty weeks. Even if I had used a Sunday School series, I probably would have begun to lose people long before we hit the forty-week mark.

A third weakness of the project was the lack of flow. A sermon series that works through a book of the Bible has a natural ebb and flow to it. It follows the contours of the book. Context always links the sermons from one week to the next. In a doctrinal study, the connection is not as natural. A flow is present, but the preacher must work harder to make it apparent to the congregation. Often, the flow is more conceptual in nature and requires more imagination to bring out. This was a weekly battle and was a weakness in the series.

A final weakness was the survey itself. How does one gauge the level of doctrinal understanding of a congregation with a survey that is expected to cover ten areas of doctrine as well as two specific areas of focus (prosperity theology and NAR)? The survey could have easily been a hundred questions, but that would have severely limited participation, and the results probably would have been skewed (at a certain point people stop thinking about the questions and just start circling answers). Even thirty-two questions pushed what I thought the members could handle. Anything less would have not given very accurate results. As it was, there were a few poorly worded questions that had to be discarded. This again was a weakness that was necessary given the other limitations of the project.

A subject that I am not sure to include as a weakness is how I would evaluate this project from the perspective of expository preaching. The sermons in this series were

not expository in the sense that they did not involve only one main text per sermon. However, while the series was more topical in nature, each text that was used in the project was handled in a careful and expository manner. My desire would have been to include more longer passages in the sermons, but it simply was not possible.

### **Things I Would Do Differently**

I have had a few months to think back over the project, and there are a few things I would do differently if I was to do the project again. First, I would do the survey a little differently. I had never done a survey of this kind or had any experience with analyzing results. After going through all the surveys that were turned in, I found a few things I would have like to have modified. I would have refined the survey a little more, probably by being a little more systematic in the categories of questions I asked and how narrowly I focused on certain issues. I also would have done some test questions before developing the survey. I had no idea how the congregation would interpret or respond to the various questions. I also would make the survey slightly longer. Forty questions would be a more ideal length to deal with the depth that I desired while keeping it short enough that people would fill the entire thing out.

Second, I would create more periods for questions and answers. After taking a Sunday School period to answer questions and encourage discussion on the topic of election, I realized just how helpful that would have been for some other subjects. I think I would have taken a Sunday School period once a month throughout the series to give more time for interaction and questions.

Third, I would narrow the focus of the project. My rationale for the focus of the project was rooted in a solid evaluation of the congregation. WBC needed instruction in basic theology, and the church was being influenced directly by prosperity theology and the New Apostolic Reformation. At times, I found it hard to tie everything together. If I were to do the project over again, I would focus entirely on teaching basic Bible



doctrines, while making application to various erroneous teachings as they arise.

Fourth, I would slightly lengthen the sermon series. Twenty weeks was a good length, but there were just a few topics that felt a little rushed. An extra few weeks would allow me to cover the material a little more comprehensively while still being short enough that people would not tire of the series.

### **Theological Reflections**

I learned so much through this process. After having some time to meditate on the project as a whole, a few theological thoughts emerged. First, churches that are made up of members who hide their spiritual immaturity under a guise of cultural Christianity are susceptible to major theological error. WBC was a church made up largely of second and third generation Christians. Most had been in church their entire lives and knew the Bible. They had been trained well in behaviors to avoid and patterns to follow. However, many had not come to their convictions through their own Bible study, but rather through the teaching and opinions of various speakers and teachers. This led to a theological grid that was not strong. If something sounded biblical and was presented in a winsome way, it could potentially be picked up by many within the congregation. I learned a lot from this. Surface impressions of a congregation must be either confirmed or destroyed based on time and interaction with the members. Sometimes a façade of deep spirituality masks a very shallow faith protected by learned behaviors.

Second, the influence of prosperity theology and the New Apostolic Reformation are real problems for the modern church. I watch Joel Osteen or Creflo Dollar and convince myself that no one would fall for their presentation of the faith. Yet by the very fact that I know their names and they have massive television ministries I know that I am wrong. Thousands are buying into these teachings, and I have started to understand why. I have at times been frustrated with the struggles within the local church. I have struggled with why godly people struggle while the wicked seem to prosper. My

flesh wants to believe that I can make my dreams come true simply by tapping into principles that God has intentionally built into his creation. There would be something very freeing about having an apostle to consult with and go to for divine direction. This is dangerous, because it is rooted in my own desires, not in the text. As pastors, we must not hesitate to point out the dangers and deceptions of these movements.

Third, Christians can be inconsistent in their beliefs. As I was evaluating the pre-surveys, I was surprised to find many within the congregation give answers that were solid in some regards but weak in others. People who had been saved for decades were giving answers I would have expected from much younger believers. Much of this inconsistency was rooted in a lack of biblical knowledge paired with a reliance on “pop theology.” For example, as discussed above, the idea emerged in the pre-surveys that man’s biggest problem is not his own sinfulness, but his self-image or self-esteem. This does not come from anywhere in the Bible, but straight from a culture that shies away from any reference to sin or personal responsibility.

Fourth, older believers can learn new things if they are willing. Basic theology is not anything new, but for the congregation of WBC, this study covered theology in a format and depth that many had never experienced. I’m sure there were some who emerged without really seeing the value in the study. But many seemed to truly understand and begin to grasp the importance of understanding biblical theology. I interacted with several older believers who indicated that the study had really served to tie together much of what they believed. It also served to connect the imperatives of the Bible with the theology of the Bible.

Fifth, churches need to be taught theology. I don’t think there should be theological series all the time, or that we should get away from the systematic preaching of individual books of the Bible. But Christians need a foundation of biblical theology to build on. Too many have either never been taught the value of theology or have only seen theology as a field reserved for the halls of seminaries and Bible colleges. This is a

tragedy that contributes to weak churches and anemic Christians. Pastors need to find a forum for laying a solid theological foundation for their congregations.

### **Personal Reflections**

In addition to seeing some theological reflections emerge from this study, I also felt some strong personal reflections come to the surface. First, it can be fun to go outside your comfort zone in preaching and teaching. I was not looking forward to doing a topical theological study. It sounded hard, long, and with the possibility of little benefit to the congregation. In retrospect, the experience stretched me, made me a better preacher and teacher, and was fun. I won't change my normal pattern of preaching and teaching, but much like preparing a first-person narrative sermon helped my insight into how to better preach narrative material, preaching a topical theological study will help in my normal preparation.

Second, I realized that I cannot allow the cultural conditions that surround me keep me from preaching the whole counsel of God. It seems like everywhere I look, there are preachers who are preaching shorter messages that are heavily saturated with video clips, cultural anecdotes, and minimal textual explanation and exegesis. Now there is some benefit there. Pastors must always be careful to connect the text of Scripture with the culture to which they are speaking. This is a far cry from watering down the text or intentionally ignoring aspects of the text. From this study, I learned that people will engage with theology if it is connected to their everyday lives.

Third, I must be careful about expecting too much or too little from people. I went into this project with a lot of trepidation about whether the people could handle it or whether the entire thing would flop. I was humbled and impressed by how misplaced those expectations were. On the other hand, I was concerned that certain people who filled out surveys would have no room for improvement between their pre and post-surveys. These high expectations were more than many could handle, and I realized as I

reviewed the pre-surveys just how wrong I had been. As pastors, we walk a fine line between properly evaluating our congregations and placing unfair or unrealistic expectations on them.

Fourth, we as pastors must use wisdom in deciding when to leave a pattern of preaching through books of the Bible for the purpose of addressing a specific need of the congregation in a more topical fashion. I need to know my people well enough to be able to preach through books of the Bible and speak directly to their life situations. However, there will be times that the church is facing a specific challenge or issue, and that issue can better be addressed by dealing with a variety of texts. I realized that I probably need to be a little more flexible to what the Spirit may be trying to do in my scheduling.

Fifth, loving people builds a lot of credibility with them. I could see some of the faces in the congregation when I announced a twenty-week doctrinal series. I think some people tuned in the first week simply because they knew it was for my doctoral project and they wanted to contribute. The Holy Spirit took it from there. But many gave that initial attention because I was their pastor. I had shown love by coming to the hospital when they had surgery, praying for them when they were struggling, and listening to their concerns and questions. This daily investment in their lives had built the credibility I needed to get them to tune in for something that did not initially sound all that exciting.

### **Conclusion**

This project was eye-opening. I learned so much and was stretched in ways I am only now completely understanding. I saw the Holy Spirit use the Word of God to open eyes and help believers better understand their Savior. Theology is a precious thing because it is the study of God and His self-revelation. Every Christian needs to understand the value of this and pastors need to teach theology in a winsome and engaging fashion. Overall, this project helped Christians connect what the Bible says

about the major doctrines of the faith with the issues they are going through in their everyday lives. This was definitely worth the time invested in preparing and delivering the material. To God be the glory.

## APPENDIX 1

### BASICS OF DOCTRINAL UNDERSTANDING ASSESSMENT

This instrument is the Basics of Doctrinal Understanding Assessment (BDUA). Some general questions will be followed by a thirty-question survey with a six-point Likert scale. The instrument's purpose is to assess each member's present level of doctrinal understanding.

BASICS OF DOCTRINAL UNDERSTANDING  
ASSESSMENT

**Agreement to Participate**

The research in which you are about to participate is designed to identify the current doctrinal/theological understanding of the members of WBC. This research is being conducted by Brian Dempsey for the purpose of collecting data for a ministry project. In this research, you will answer questions before the project and you will answer the same questions at the conclusion of the project. Any information you provide will be held strictly confidential, and at no time will your name be reported or identified with your responses. Participation is strictly voluntary, and you are free to withdraw at any time. By completion of this survey, you are giving informed consent for the use of your responses in this project.

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Name (or 4-digit code):** \_\_\_\_\_

**Gender** \_\_\_\_\_ **Age** \_\_\_\_\_

**General Questions:**

1. How many years have you known Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior? \_\_\_\_\_
2. Are you currently serving in any leadership or teaching capacity?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
3. How many hours a week do you read your Bible for personal study or devotions?
4. Do you currently spend time memorizing scripture?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
5. Do you have a daily discipline of praying for other people?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No

6. How would you define the gospel? (Use back of sheet to answer)

**Directions:** Please mark the appropriate answer. Some questions may ask you to give your opinion using the following scale:

SD = strongly disagree

D = disagree

DS = disagree somewhat

AS = agree somewhat

A = agree

SA = strongly agree

- |                                                                                                   |    |   |    |    |   |    |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----|---|----|----|---|----|
| 1. Mankind is basically good                                                                      | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 2. God desires that each of His children be materially wealthy                                    | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 3. God continues to give special revelation to His people                                         | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 4. The church should have Apostles today just like Peter and Paul                                 | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 5. If I have enough faith, God will grant a positive answer to my prayer.                         | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 6. If I am suffering, it is probably because I have sinned.                                       | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 7. Suffering is never a spiritually positive experience.                                          | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 8. Being rich is a clear sign of God's special blessing.                                          | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 9. I can clearly articulate the gospel and lead someone to salvation.                             | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 10. I believe that God can help His people grow through their experience of suffering and trials. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 11. Man's main problem is self-image or self-esteem.                                              | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 12. If a person does not repent of his sin, then salvation is not possible.                       | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |



13. Scripture is the authoritative Word of God	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
14. To disobey Scripture is to disobey God Himself.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
15. To disbelieve scripture is to disbelieve God Himself.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
16. The words spoken by Jesus (the “red letters) carry more authority than other parts of Scripture.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
17. Scripture is the one and only means God uses to communicate truth about Himself.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
18. The revelation of Scripture is required for us to know the good news about salvation.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
19. It is possible that God will speak again and add new books to the Bible.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
20. Sin is the ultimate source of people’s problems.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
21. Suffering is never God’s plan for his children.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
22. After becoming a Christian, God changes us so we no longer struggle with temptation.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
23. There is only one God.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
24. The Holy Spirit is a force.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
25. The Holy Spirit is fully God.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA

26. Anyone who fails to repent and believe the gospel will spend eternity apart from God.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
27. You need a “spiritual authority” to tell you what God wants you to do with your life.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
28. It is important for Christians to be active and involved in their local church.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
29. Most sin problems are related to demonic attack (a demon of pride, demon of selfishness, etc).	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
30. I am confident in my understanding of the basic doctrines of the Christian faith.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
31. Salvation is obtained by grace through faith after I have done all that I can do.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
32. There is a chance that someone who does lots of good things in his life will make it to heaven even if he doesn’t accept Christ as his Lord and Savior.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA

## APPENDIX 2

### BASICS OF DOCTRINAL UNDERSTANDING CURRICULUM EVALUATION

The following evaluation will be sent to a leadership panel of two WBC deacons and two other trained and qualified members of WBC. This panel will evaluate the curriculum to help ensure that it is faithful to scripture and sufficiently thorough to equip the members of WBC with the basic doctrines of the Christian faith.

Name of evaluator: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

<b>Biblical Doctrine Curriculum Evaluation</b>					
<b>1 = insufficient; 2 = requires attention; 3 = sufficient; 4 = exemplary</b>					
Criteria	1	2	3	4	Comments
<b>Biblical Faithfulness</b>					
The content of the curriculum is textually sound. Proper exegesis and use of texts was made.					
The curriculum is theologically sound.					
<b>Scope</b>					
The curriculum sufficiently covers each issue it sets out to address					
The curriculum sufficiently interacts with the teachings of prosperity theology and the New Apostolic Reformation					
<b>Methodology</b>					
The curriculum makes use of various learning approaches such as sermons, study guides, and discussion.					
<b>Practicality</b>					
At the end of the curriculum, members of WBC will better grasp basic theology especially as it relates to prosperity theology and the New Apostolic Reformation					

Please include any additional comments regarding the curriculum below.

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## ABSTRACT

### EQUIPPING MEMBERS OF WASHINGTON BAPTIST CHURCH IN DILLSBORO, INDIANA, WITH THE FOUNDATIONS OF CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE

Brian Timothy Dempsey, D.Min  
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2018  
Faculty Supervisor: Dr. Michael E. Pohlman

This project seeks to equip the members of Washington Baptist Church in Dillsboro, Indiana with the foundational doctrines of the Christian faith. In chapter 1, the ministry context of WBC is given, along with the goals for the project. Chapter 2 focuses on the exegesis of five key passages of Scripture. This is to demonstrate the biblical need for churches to be taught good doctrine. Chapter 3 deals with some of the specific areas of theological error that are creeping into Christian churches. Chapter 4 covers the project itself, giving the methodology of the curriculum itself. Chapter 5 evaluates the effectiveness of the project. The goal of this project is that Christians might have confidence in their doctrinal beliefs and be able to identify and refute false teachings.

## VITA

Brian Timothy Dempsey

### EDUCATION

B.A., Northland International University, 2003

M.Div., Calvary Baptist Theological Seminary, 2007

### ORGANIZATIONS

The Evangelical Theological Society

### MINISTERIAL EMPLOYMENT

Assistant Pastor, Calvary Baptist Church, Pottstown, Pennsylvania, 2003-2010

Senior Pastor, Washington Baptist Church, Dillsboro, Indiana, 2010-2017

Senior Pastor, First Baptist Church, Perryville, Maryland, 2017-