

"...about all that Jesus began to do and teach" (Acts 1:3).

## Developing a Love-driven Church

John 14:15

I am grateful to be home as well as among my church family after being gone for two Sundays. As some of you have quipped, this may mean you are in trouble today as I have not preached for two weeks and have been filling up to overflowing.

Yet, my time away served me well in reinforcing within me my own call and commitment to preaching and exhorting from the Word of God. I was blessed by the teaching of the XL Ministries Bible conference in New Mexico, which emphasized the pastoral letter of 2 Timothy and specifically the preacher's call of 2 Timothy 4:1-5. Please allow me to read this to you as this is the call to the preacher, this is my duty to you:

*1 I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom: 2 preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction. 3 For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires, 4 and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths. 5 But you, be sober in all things, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.*

This is the call of the preacher. In addition to the blessing of this reminder of my call, I was also blessed by what I heard, through the miracle of the internet, from Tyler and from Jase as taught in this pulpit the last two weeks. I would like to sum up their teaching, hopefully I understood it correctly. First, you heard from Tyler, as he taught from Matthew 25, the necessity to live out the Word of God, that is to serve God by serving, not only one another, but also by serving deliberately, intentionally, a world that needs to not only hear of the love of God in Christ, but also to see of the love of God, to experience the love of God in Christ through you His people.

And then last week, you were blessed to hear the entirety of Psalm 119; a total of 176 verses (show off!), that reminds us of the necessity of learning about God; the wonder and the privilege of knowing God; of learning about who He is, what He is like, what He purposes and then, through this knowledge of God via His Holy Word, of being equipped to obey Him and to serve Him and to make Him known.

These two messages sum up our great call and duty as a church, and as those who profess Christ; to know God and who desire to make Him known. And in light of these two messages, I intend to take a brief two week break from our verse by verse series in the book of Acts to dovetail off of these messages in order to speak and to exhort us to consider what all this means to us as a church.

If Psalm 119 is an exhortation to be learning the truth of God; and if Matthew 25 is an exhortation to be living out the truth of God; then what does that look like; and, equally important, how are we doing? How are we accomplishing these two exhortations to be learning the truth and to be living out the truth?

Now, I want you to consider carefully what I have just said; that there are two exhortations we have been challenged with in the past two weeks; to learn the truth and then to live out the truth. It would be our tendency; it would be our defensive mechanism to think that by simply learning the truth; by sitting in the pew and hearing a sermon; by reading our Bibles regularly, by

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teaching a lesson to the children or to the adults; that somehow we just naturally default then to living out the truth. In other words, we can tend to think that because we have come to learn what is true and right that it is somehow the same as living out what is true and right. However, even as I say that, you know this is not always our experience. For often, we are better at knowing what is true and right than living what is true and right. We can often be better, as James 1 reminds us, of being merely hearers of the word rather than doers.

Now I have rattled on for a few minutes here and I have yet to give you a text or a big idea of what is on my heart this morning. So let me give you my proposition, my big idea, followed with just one verse and bit of explanation so that we can discover what the Bible teaches as the bridge, the link between learning what is true and right and actually living out what is true and right. Here is my proposition: ***We will always tend to live out what we have come to love most.*** In other words, and here comes the heavy admonition, if we find a discrepancy, if we are finding some kind of gap between what we have come to learn about God and His commands for us in comparison to what we actually live out then we have a problem that needs to be fixed. For if our learning the truth is at some high level, but our living out the truth is at a lower level, then we need to pray and to strive to see our standard of living raised. So I submit to you, that if we desire to see our standard of living raised; if we desire to live out more and more of God's truth in proportion to what we have learned of God truth, then we must ask ourselves, have we come to love God's truth more than anything else?

Let us look at just one simple, straightforward statement of our Lord Jesus Christ that serves as the basis for this statement that to live out the truth, we must not only learn the truth, but we must also come to love the truth as well as the Giver of that truth. Turn to John 14. As you turn there, may I remind you that this chapter is in the middle of what is called the Upper Room Discourse. This was the final message or sermon Jesus would give to His disciples before heading to the cross. It was at this time Jesus was revealing some of the most intimate of truths to His disciples; the most important things He desired to leave them. And in John 14:15 we read this exhortation of Jesus, ***"If you love Me, you will keep my commandments."*** From this verse, let me pull out for you three things that are absolutely necessary if a person is to live rightly before Jesus as Lord and Savior. If we want to live rightly before Jesus, then these three things must become increasingly a part of our lives.

1. We must learn the truth
2. We must love the truth
3. We must live out the truth

## **1. We must learn the truth**

Implicit in John 14:15 is the necessity of learning the truth. Jesus said, ***"If you love Me, you will keep my commandments."*** In other words, "You will keep My instructions, My directives, My exhortations." For the previous three years, Jesus had been instructing His disciples concerning who God is and what God requires of them. Jesus expounded on the Old Testament, revealing what is the truth about God, about man, about salvation and about life. Implicit in this statement then is that we are learning the commandments, the revelations of Jesus. You will learn the truth from the Word of God.

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## **2. We must love the truth**

Jesus said, ***"If you love Me, you will keep my commandments."*** If you have affection for Jesus, you will have affection for His word. If you come to delight in Jesus, you will come to delight in His words and His commandments. As we have already noted, we tend to live out what we have come to love most. If we find a discrepancy between our knowledge of God's truth and what He wants us to do and our actual doing of God's truth, finding ourselves doing other and lesser things, then we must ask ourselves if we are truly loving the truth?

## **3. We must live out the truth**

Finally, Jesus said, ***"If you love Me, you will keep my commandments."*** You will hold fast, you will watch over, you will bring to pass and perform what I have said. In short, you will do what He has asked, what He has commanded. Is that the defining characteristic of your life? Do you delight in such things and have they become for you, your greatest desire to live out.

Beloved, in this outline I just gave you, do you see that God intends for there to be a progression of truth worked out and worked through your life? God intends for His truth to travel. God's truth has a flow through a person's life. God's truth must first begin in the head, with our learning of the truth. God's truth is to be learned and must reside in the head. But this truth is not simply meant to stay in the head. It is next meant to travel to our hearts. Not only are we to know the truth, but we must also come to love the truth. And, as we come to love the truth, the next stop is the living out of the truth; our behavior is to be affected by what we love and cherish, in this case the truth of God. So when God's truth says, as it does in Mark 12:30, to love the Lord our God with all our heart, all our soul, all our mind, and all our strength, then we don't just know that to be true, we come to experience that, to see our affections for God increase. When God says, as He does in 1 Peter 2:17 to ***"love the brotherhood,"*** that becomes more than some command that we know, but an action we love to perform. And when God says, as He does in Mark 12:31 to ***"love your neighbor as yourself;"*** you will not just sit idly by wondering who is your neighbor, but you will begin, as it states in Galatians 6:10, ***"to do good to all people, and especially those who are of the household of faith."***

Beloved, the mind's understanding of truth, of knowing and learning the truth, is necessary for our hearts' engagement with that truth; of loving the truth. Knowing the truth provides for us the possibility for loving the truth. You cannot love what you do not know. If we want to be a people who are known for living out the truth, who are known for really loving God, then we cannot bypass head, for that which drives and inflames our hearts must be the truth of God. Look with me at Psalm 119:97 were we read;

***O how I love Your law! It is my meditation all the day!***

O how I love, I delight, I cherish, I regard as most glorious and wonderful and weighty; your law (that is Your Word, Your truth, Your revelation to me). It is my meditation (my thoughts, my contemplation, my filter for life, that which guides me in all I think, and say and do). And notice the scope of this love for God's truth as the Psalmist does not merely think on it a bit in the morning, or when it is convenient, but when, all the day! When we see a disconnect between what we have learned concerning what God wants for us to know and do and what we actually live out; the question we must answer is this, "What have I come to love more than God and His Word?" If we love the truth, we will want to learn more of God's truth and if we love the truth, we

# The Church Alive

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will want to live out more of God's truth. Loving the truth is the bridge, it is the link between our learning and living out the truth, between what we have come to know in our heads and actually do with our hands.

Jonathan Edwards, the great preacher and teacher of God's truth in the New England colonies of the 1700's expressed an apt illustration of what we are talking about here. He likened this progression of truth, of learning the truth, loving the truth and then living the truth to a fireplace. If you want a hot, raging fire, what to you need? Well, to begin with, you need wood to burn. And the more wood, and the better quality of that wood, the better potential for that hot raging fire. Are you following me? Little wood, little fire, a lot of wood, of good quality wood, the better potential for a big fire.

Edwards likened the wood for the fireplace to truth with the fireplace itself picturing our minds. If you want a hot raging fire in your fireplace, fill it with lots of good wood. If you want a hot and intense living out your life for God, then you must fill your mind with lots of good thoughts, with lots of truth concerning God. The more and the better the truth you fill you mind with, the bigger the fire. Filling the fireplace with wood then is learning the truth and the actual fire is living out the truth.

However, a fireplace filled with good wood does not a raging fire make. What else is needed? The wood, that truth, must be ignited; something must be done to cause the wood to burn. And what is it that causes the wood to burn? Our affection; our love for God and His word. The hearts engagement with the truth; of loving the truth is necessary for us to live out that truth. Our love for God and His truth become the flame that gets the fire raging. Too often, we have grown content seeing the truth only as truth, only as fact rather than something we desire to do and to experience. I do not simply want to know John 3:16 as a fact of Scripture, I want to experience the transforming power of having believed in the only Begotten Son; to experience the peace of knowing I will not perish, to experience the power of living eternal life right now. I pray and strive by the power of God's Spirit (this is a God thing, I cannot do it myself) to love God and His Word so much that I crave to learn it; and I crave to do it. For Jesus said, **"If you love Me, you will keep my commandments."** Does that describe me? Does that describe you this morning? Does this describe our church?

At some level, I pray that each one of us, if we have received Jesus as our Lord and Savior, would say yes, maybe a little here and a little there. At some level we can say that it describes our church a little here and a little there. Yet we know, you know that your life has a discrepancy between what you are learning about God and what you are actually living out for God. And the same is true for our church. In other words, we can and must be committed to doing better; to be both putting more and more good wood in the fireplace (in our heads – Psalm 119, learning the truth), but we must also be igniting that wood with a love for God and His Word so that the raging fire; the power and energy of that truth is released; it is lived out – Matthew 25, "to the extent that you did it [keep my commandments] to one of these brothers of Mine, even the least of them, you did it to Me."

Now then, in the time remaining, I want to be highly practical. How do we develop this kind of love for God and His Word? How are we to prepare ourselves for this progression of truth; of learning the truth, loving the truth and then living out the truth? Let me walk you through as many applications as we have time for; some being obvious reminders, others perhaps being more convicting and challenging exhortations.

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## 1. Read and meditate on God's Word every day

You cannot love what you do not know and reading and meditating on the Word of God is the only way that you can begin to develop love, appreciation and obedience to God. This principle of reading and meditating on the Word of God is expressed clearly in Psalm 1:1-3

***1 How blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, Nor stand in the path of sinners, Nor sit in the seat of scoffers! [not filling his fireplace with things that will not rightly burn] 2 But his delight [his love, his passion, what he cherishes most] is in the law of the Lord, And in His law he meditates day and night. 3 He will be like a tree firmly planted by streams of water, Which yields its fruit in its season And its leaf does not wither; And in whatever he does, he prospers.***

Why should we so love the Word of God and meditate on it? Because, according to 2 Timothy 3:16, the Scriptures are "inspired by God [that is "God-breathed" – from the very mouth of God] and profitable or useful for four things; "for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness." When you read God's word, take time to mediate on it? And how should you mediate on it? Well, from this verse in 2 Timothy, we can start by asking ourselves the following four questions:

1. What did I learn (teaching)?
2. Where do I fall short (reproof)?
3. What do I need to do about it (correction)?
4. How can I make this a consistent part of my life (training in righteousness)?

If we will read God's word and meditate like this, we will develop a love for God and His word.

## 2. Pray more throughout the week

We read in 1 Thessalonians 5:17 the simply command, "***pray without ceasing.***" We are to be a people of prayer, but just what are we to pray for? I do not want to limit your prayers, but as a part of developing a love-driven Church, we need to pray that God would grant us and honest a good heart that would hear and accept what we hear from God as we read His word and as we hear His word preached.

To this end, we need to also pray for the preacher, praying that he will preach with great liberty and boldness and clarity (Ephesians 6:19-20; Colossians 4:3-4). That through the preaching of God's word Sunday by Sunday, and through our Bible fellowships, that God's Word would transform our lives. We must never forget that God speaks to us through the preaching of God's Word. Do you pray earnestly for me in that task? Hear this interesting commentary by Philip Ryken, a gifted pastor. He writes: "*Many churchgoers assume that the sermon starts when the pastor opens his mouth on Sunday. However, listening to a sermon actually starts the week before. It starts when we pray for the minister, asking God to bless the time he spends studying the Bible as he prepares to preach. In addition to helping the preacher, our prayers create in us a sense of expectancy for the ministry of God's Word. This is one of the reasons that when it comes to preaching, congregations generally get what they pray for.*"

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When we pray for our understanding of God’s Word, and for those who will deliver God’s Word to us, we prepare ourselves to love the truth so that we might passionately burn, or live out that truth before others.

### 3. Confess Your Sin

In James 1:21 we read, ***“Therefore, putting aside all filthiness and all that remains of wickedness, in humility receive the word implanted, which is able to save your souls.”*** We cannot love what we do not know and we cannot know God as we harbor sin in our lives. Beloved, sin gets in the way of our ability to hear what God wants to say to us and limits what God will do in us. Most of us have been taught that sin hinders our prayer life; that as we harbor sin, our communication with God is broken. In the same way, sin hinders God’s communication to us through the preaching of the Word and through the reading of the Word. Before every time you read your Bible and before every sermon or teaching from God’s word that you hear, spend time to prayerfully examine your life and humbly confess your sins to God.

Up to now, everything has sounded very biblical, right? But now I am moving to some even more practical ways in which to prepare our hearts for loving God’s truth that while I do not have a verse for, I think you will agree is vital if we are to learn, love and live out God’s truth.

### 4. Reduce Your Media Intake

According to the most recent surveys, the average American spends about four hours a day watching TV. If you include video games, radio and the use of the internet, that time jumps up to nine hours a day. What are we filling our minds with? This is not the good word and the sad thing is that by filling ourselves with so much that is not God’s truth, we begin to train ourselves not to even listen to God’s truth. Saint Augustine wrote, *“To proclaim the Word of truth as well as to listen to it is hard work...Thus, let us exert ourselves to listening.”* We must train ourselves to listen to and spend time in God’s truth. This will increase our love for God’s truth; this will excite us to learn God’s truth and then to live out or do God’s truth. J.C. Ryle said, *“Love is the grand secret of true obedience to God.”* Do you love God’s truth? Do you love God? Have you come to love God for sending His Son Jesus Christ to be your substitute on that cross for your sin? Do you know that Jesus took your place, taking what you deserved; the wrath of God for all your sins and have given you His own goodness and righteousness so that you might learn of God, that you might love God, that you might live and serve God? If not, would you call upon the name of the Lord Jesus, asking Him to open your eyes that you might come to know these things and be saved?

Beloved, if we would be a church and a people that sees the gap between what we have learned about God and what we actually live out for God closed, then let us pray earnestly that we would come to love God truth, knowing that we tend to live out what we love most. May we love the truth of God.

*Soli Deo Gloria*

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