

THE MAKING OF THE CHRISTIAN PERSON

1 Timothy 3

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First Timothy 3. This chapter speaks to us about bishops and deacons and deaconesses and the church as the household of God.

“Here is a trustworthy saying: If anyone sets his heart on being an overseer [“bishop,” KJV], he desires a noble task. Now the overseer must be above reproach, the husband of but one wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not given to drunkenness, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him with proper respect. (If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God’s church?) He must not be a recent convert, or he may become conceited and fall under the same judgment as the devil. He must also have a good reputation with outsiders, so that he will not fall into disgrace and into the devil’s trap” (1 Timothy 3:1–7, NIV).

At this point most of us who are pastors are willing to insert the phrase “I resign!” But reading on, verse 8: “Deacons, likewise, are to be men worthy of respect, sincere, not indulging in much wine, and not pursuing dishonest gain. They must keep hold of the deep truths of the faith with a clear conscience. They must first be tested; and then if there is nothing against them, let them serve as deacons. In the same way, their wives are to be women worthy of respect, not malicious talkers but temperate and trustworthy in everything. A deacon must be the husband of but one wife and must manage his children and his household well. Those who have served well gain an excellent standing and great assurance in their faith in Christ Jesus. Although I hope to come to you soon, I am writing you these instructions so that, if I am delayed, you will know how people

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ought to conduct themselves in God's household, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth. Beyond all question, the mystery of godliness is great: He appeared in a body, was vindicated by the Spirit, was seen by angels, was preached among the nations, was believed on in the world, was taken up in glory" (1 Timothy 3:8–16, NIV).

I've entitled this message today "The Making of the Christian Person." For I sincerely believe the qualities that are asked of Christian leaders, namely bishops and deacons, are the very qualities that the Lord wants for us all. I, with some fear and trepidation, preach on a subject which allows you to hold up your mirror and look and see if your leaders—pastor, staff, deacons—are actually being here what Paul says that we are to be. It gives you an excellent opportunity to do your best. I would urge you that if you see things in me or another leader of the church that are deficient of these that you do three things—you talk to us personally about it, you pray for us, and you have mercy.

I recognize that a great deal of stereotyping has been done in regard to the role of the clergy or ministry. And clergy and politicians both suffer a great deal these days with the problem of credibility. Some years ago I came across a book called *How to Become a Bishop Without Being Religious*. It's a satire written by a Methodist minister. He'd evidently been around a lot of clergymen who were pious. The thesis of this book was the clergyman should be pious, not religious. The most dangerous thing in the world is to be religious, really devoted to God. What one needs to do, if he's to be a clergyman, is to affect an image of piety. He gives some excellent ideas. A chapter on the professional stance, pastoral attire, the car to drive, the value of the stained glass voice, selecting the clerical wife, how to be impressive in the pulpit. Three rules: make them cry, make them feel religious, entertain them. Above all preach without notes. Raising money for the church? Make people feel guilty and then they'll give. People expect their

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minister to be serious and not solemn, unworldly but possessed of some practical sense, wise but not smart, gentle but not effeminate, poor but not paupers, unctuous but not pompous, neat but not natty, diligent but not ambitious, upright in his own conduct but not censorious of theirs, forthright but tactful, affable but reserved.

When we think of the images of persons who are involved in Christian leadership, we sometimes have the idea that maybe they're a grade above being human. That they're not real people. One of the principles of the gospel of Jesus Christ is that Jesus became human. The Incarnation is about His humanity. One of the things that are desperately needed to effect closeness of relationship between pastor and people and between leaders and people is the sense that we have a common bond together. That simply because I stand on a higher elevation than you in preaching doesn't mean that somehow I'm a cut above you.

Paul is doing something very important here in describing the roles of bishop and deacon in the church. He doesn't present job descriptions of what these people do. Although we can put together from other texts in the New Testament what is involved in these offices. Here, instead, he's concerned about what kind of persons these people are. His basic thrust is, is the Christian leader an imitable person? Do you want to be like him? That's the prime quality. For Paul has that crazy idea that the Christian life is, in its fundamental impact, better caught than taught. It must be caught before it is taught.

The New Testament has this kind of perspective. When it talks about the role of bishop and deacon it's saying there's something to be communicated by the example and imitation. The example is in turn to be imitated by others.

I. There are qualifications for a bishop or elder.

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This terms “bishop” and “elder,” which are used later in Timothy, might throw you. We don’t commonly use these terms in our particular church circle today. The words in the New Testament were interchangeable. Both the bishop and the elder really held the same office. It so happened that the word “elder” came from a Jewish background. The word “bishop” was more specifically a Greek term. We see for example in Acts 19 and 20 the two terms are somewhat interchangeable. Paul when addressing the elders at Miletus tells them to take care of the flock of which the Holy Spirit had made them guardians (or bishops). Paul as well interchanges the terms in both Timothy and Titus, standing for the same office. He describes them as administrative and preaching offices.

The word “bishop,” when it’s found here in 1 Timothy 3, isn’t like what we think of the word “bishop” today as an administrator presiding over a whole bunch of churches and ministers. The word that is better is simply “pastor.” Paul is writing to the various pastors of the congregation that is located at Ephesus. Timothy is the head pastor, the head bishop. But there were many others. And these are the qualifications for them.

Paul begins by noting that it’s a good thing to be a bishop. If you aspire to be a pastor, that’s a good thing. It’s a wholesome task. I suppose one of the ways of knowing the will of God is not only through direct revelation, but sometimes God takes volunteers as well. Maybe this is what Paul is inferring in this passage. That if you want to volunteer for this post and have the graces and the gifts that God can ordain and use, fine. You desire a good thing. But if you desire it, here are the qualifications for it.

A. The first qualification is that of being “above reproach.” The root meaning of this word literally is “someone who cannot be laid hold upon.” That does not carry the idea of somebody who’s slippery. Like a stainless steel mountain that has no nooks or crevices in it where you can

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gain a fingerhold or toehold to climb. You'd just slide off. The idea for this office, and indeed for every Christian life, is that God would help us live such a life so that when our life is looked at, every remote corner looked at, all the secrets looked at, the devil or the world or the church or the family would find nothing in it that a toehold could be gained which would discredit that person's service to the Lord. Which would take away his credibility as a minister or as a Christian.

One of the forms I filed in order to become a minister, one of the questions on it was "Do you have any bad debts?" I could say, "But they're supposed to want to know my theology. What are they doing wanting to know if I have any bad debts?" But if I've been bumming people because of bad debts, that allows a toehold to be created for an attack against my credibility as a minister. Above reproach. Nothing can be laid against the life. What a marvelous goal for each of our lives as individuals.

B. They should "be the husband of one wife." We might spend a moment on that. That requires us to look at it with some interpretation as to what the apostle meant. Does it mean that it's ok for everybody else to be married to more than one? Everybody else in the Christian church could be polygamous, but the pastor has to be monogamous? No, not at all. We note from other parts of God's Word that His design is one man and one woman in a marriage relationship. Mark 10, for example. Is this a prohibition against those who are single? Apparently not, for Paul indicates in 1 Corinthians 7 that he himself is single, and he urges others to fulfill that role and he himself held this office. Is it a prohibition against a widower, for example, who has remarried? He had over the course of his lifetime been married once, then later married again after his first wife had passed away. Roman 7 tells us that upon the death of a spouse the legal contract declares that a marriage is now over because of the death of one of the partners. The person is no longer bound.

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When a widower remarries he's not married to two wives. He's only married to one wife. The previous wife is dead. Or a person, because of the infidelity of a marriage partner or an unbeliever has put the Christian out of the house because of their faith, whether such a person upon divorce and remarriage can hold such an office of deacon or elder.

The phrase "husband of one wife" literally means a man of one woman. It is certainly a restriction against polygamy or divorce and remarriage. Particularly, divorce and remarriage on those instances that are not scripturally approved. So it's a person who in his marital life has a relationship with one woman. But it's more than that. The idea behind this is not only that two people are living in a legal relationship together. But I think you can press deeper into the spirit of what the apostle Paul is saying and indicating that the bishop or the pastor or deacon must be a one wife kind of man. That in his thought life, in his individual spiritual life, he is intricately united to that one person. Because in the role of leadership in the church there is such need for counsel of the Christian congregation in respect to affairs of family and marriage it is supremely important that those who hold this role be prepared to deal with the problems and the needs of the people and to have the security of a very well put together, beautiful, harmonious and integrated marriage. Paul therefore is putting this right at the forefront: "Let the leader be the husband of one wife."

C. He also says that the pastor should "be temperate." This carries with it the idea of soberness or watchfulness or diligence. The same word in 1 Thessalonians 5:7-8 is translated this way.

"Those who are drunk, get drunk at night. But since we belong to the day, let us be sober."

Sober—same word—sober and temperate. And it is the opposite of the person that is addicted to wine, as we'll see later.

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D. A fourth qualification is that the pastor “be sensible.” That is that he’s prudent, thoughtful, and self-controlled. The word is used in Mark 5:15 to describe the Gadarene demoniac who was out there ripping his clothes off, beating himself, yelling, hurting himself with stones. When Jesus healed him he sat there clothed and in his right mind. Same word for right mind is being used here for the idea “sensible.” Someone who has it together.

E. He must also “be dignified.” I have a rough time with this word “dignified.” It’s easy to translate the word “dignified” as “pompous.” I’ve never had the desire to be pompous. The word for dignified is the same word that is used in 3:9 where it talks about how women should adorn themselves. The word “adorn” is literally the word from which we derive “cosmetics.” It’s how you arrange yourself. That same word is being used here of a bishop. He must be adorned or put together, arranged.

F. He must “be hospitable.” That means a friend of strangers. This is something which is asked for from all believers. Hebrews 13:2: “Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.” Hospitality.

G. A bishop or pastor must “be an apt teacher.” The word literally means skillful in teaching. It carries with it the understanding that the transmission of doctrine, the process by which the Christian congregation grows up in the Lord, is one that’s right. Doctrinally and in relationship to others.

H. “No drunkard.” The word is “addicted to wine.” It’s also used for deacons. They cannot be addicted to wine. That word “addicted” is translated in a different way in 4:13 where Paul tells Timothy, “Till I come, attend to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching, to teaching.” The word “attend” in verse 13 is the same word as “addicted to wine.” Be addicted, instead, in the

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pastoral office, to public reading of Scripture, to preaching and to teaching. That explains a lot of things. Be addicted to it.

If one is addicted to wine, instead it'll negate his being able to live above reproach. Temperate, sensible, and dignified.

I. "He must not be violent." The idea behind violent is that he cannot be a pugnacious man or a bully. Either in words or in actions. It's so easy as a pastor of a church to be kind of a small pope. There are many pastors I know that protest greatly the authoritarian nature of the papacy who, in their own locality as pastors, are kind of small popes. This is what is involved in being a pugnacious man, a bully. One who is going to roll right over everybody else to get your own way.

J. Instead, Paul says, don't be that way. "Be gentle." The word for "gentle" carries with it the idea of yielding and kind. James says, "But the wisdom from above is first pure then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits without uncertainty or insincerity."

In Philippians we see that two women in the church were having a difficult time getting along with each other. Euodia and Syntyche in chapter 4. Paul urges them to agree in the Lord. Then he says in verse 5 of Philippians 4, "Let all men know your forbearance." The word for "forbearance" is the same word that's being used here for "gentle," or the idea is to yield. It's not a call to yield on major doctrinal matters. It's a call to exhibit the kind of a spirit which does not insist on its own way when that way is not essential to the will of God.

K. He "must not be quarrelsome." He must instead be peaceable. The opposite of fighting and combative.

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L. He must “be no lover of money.” The word literally means “not fond of silver.” This is a very important requirement. I think people that are in pastoral ministry or teaching ministry must develop an absolute lack of a materialistic point of view.

M. “Manage his household and keep his kids in tow.” I’m sure when the children get to be adults, eighteen years and older, they’re responsible for their own actions. But during that whole period of growing up there is a mark of the family that has an impact upon the church. I say this with fear and trembling because my kids are yet small. I haven’t yet gotten out of submissiveness. I’m at the point where I can physically bring them into submission. I can do that for a while. But if a person in a leadership role attempts to create good relations in the church and attempts to be a model for what the church should be like and his own family life is coming apart with lack of respect, then it disqualifies him from the role. His relationship with his family comes before his relationship with the church. If the family is not right, then the relationship with the church is not right. These are very hard and very difficult, very important and necessary words for the pastoral role.

N. Furthermore, Paul says he “must not be a recent convert.” Not “newly planted,” literally. We sometimes make great errors. We have the temptation that when a person just gets saved to immediately push him up to the front. Particularly if he has a dramatic conversion. Been saved from drugs or in prison or something. We want to get his story out. There’s a legitimate role of testifying. But if you take a person with a dramatic story and put him in the pulpit and have him go week after week and all he’s telling is his story, after a while he begins to run dry because he’s repeating the same thing over and over again. He doesn’t know enough in the Christian faith to be able to say anything more than that. So the only option he has, if he’s going to say anything beyond his story, is to turn to some novelty to keep the people coming to hear him. They’ve

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already heard his story once. The apostle is saying don't put newly converted persons in this kind of major leadership role. Or, he says, "they'll be puffed up with conceit and fall into condemnation of the devil" (1 Timothy 3:6).

What is the condemnation of the devil? Several things.

The condemnation of the devil was he sought an equality of position with God. And pride was a motivating factor of his life. Someone has said if God couldn't endure a proud angel in heaven He won't endure a proud preacher either.

To fall into the condemnation of the devil also might mean that if the person is lifted up with pride Satan then has an advantage to get into him and to trip up his life.

By the way, the same word for "devil" is the word which is translated in verse 11 as "slanderer."

It may here even be possible to translate verse 7 of chapter 3 as "fall into the reproach and snare of the slanderer." This would be the person who would find in that new convert some quality which was not a Christian virtue. Therefore be able to slander his ministry and therefore he wouldn't live above reproach as required.

O. Finally for the bishop he must be "well thought of by outsiders" (verse 7). The Christian church can't turn up its nose at the world and say, "We're going to pick whomever we want to pick for our leaders whether you like them or not." The church is concerned about its relations to the world. The church is not an island surrounded by a great moat separated from the world.

II. For deacons and deaconesses there are qualifications as well.

A. A deacon must "be serious." That doesn't mean he's a killjoy! God help us not to have killjoys. To be serious does not mean to be glum. To be serious doesn't mean you can't have humor from time to time. I have one simple test of when, as a pastor, I am becoming too wrought up in my work. I kind of suggest this as a test of when a Christian leader would use his

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sensitivity to the Lord: If I can no longer laugh, laugh at myself, enjoy it when somebody really gets a good one in on me. A sense of humor is important. But that doesn't take away seriousness. A serious person literally is a person worthy of respect and honor. It is the opposite of frivolousness.

B. He's "not double-tongued." That's a rough one! For me that is the roughest one for a person in a leadership position. If you have done any work of moderating between people, you know how difficult it is to be straight and say the same thing to this person as that person. In the Early Church the deacons had the task of administering the welfare of the church. Double-tongued, not being direct. What the apostle is calling for here is directness. This is a quality that's so crucial, and I've seen this more and more in my own life.

C. "Not addicted to much wine." Instead, we're to be addicted to those Christian tasks which are before us.

D. "Not greedy for gain."

E. "Hold the mystery of faith with a clear conscience." This is a phrase that is used to describe the fact that when a deacon is saying, "I agree with the doctrine of the church," he's not simply doing it from a mental checklist point of view, checking off the doctrines, and in his heart holding back reservations. It must be from a clear conscience. If ministry does not proceed from a clear conscience it ultimately has no effect.

F. "He must be tested first." Tested first. Not put into the role without any training or without any discipline of having filled other smaller responsibilities. Then, if he's tested and he proves himself blameless, the word for blameless is unexcused. Or there's nothing against him that can be brought to his charge. He's fulfilled the role.

G. "He's to be the husband of one wife and manage his household and children."

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H. With the description of deacons that is given in verses 8–13, slipped right into the middle of that are four qualifications for women (verse 11): “Must be serious, not slanderers but temperate and faithful in all things.”

What’s this mean? He’s not talking about women in general. He’s talking about church offices. The whole prospect that’s involved. Evidently he’s referring to the office of deaconess which is mentioned once in Scripture in Romans 16:1, “Phoebe a deaconess at Cenchrea.” Whether in the Early Church the office of deaconesses was a separate group from deacons or whether they were the same group, just the deaconess was the feminine gender of the noun. They both did the same tasks, served together, but one was deacon and one was deaconess. That’s a possibility. I tend to buy that.

But what is asked for is that these qualities be in existence. And, really, the qualities for deaconess are really the first four qualities for deacons. Serious; not be double-tongued, or a slanderer; not to be addicted to much wine, temperate; not to be greedy for gain, or faithful in all things. The result of all of this service to the Lord, Paul says, is that a deacon will gain great standing for himself and also great confidence in the faith, which is in Christ.

I. “Gain of good standing.” What does that mean? The word for “standing” is grade or step or rank. It means that as he serves well he’s gained a new stature and is able to take on more responsibilities. It may even mean this—that in the early Christian church they didn’t have the advantage of Bible schools and seminaries and professional schools. How then did they get their pastors? I think they got them from the deacons. What does it mean therefore to say, “You will gain good standing for yourself”? Does that not mean that, as you serve well as a deacon, you then become qualified to fulfill another role within the church, namely the role of bishop?

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We have gotten a wild concept of the will of God in modern times because of our schooling system. We have the idea that if you're going to go into pastoral ministry that sometime between the ages of six and seventeen you've got to know God's will for your life. Because when you're seventeen you start out—four years of college, three years of seminary, four to five years after that of some kind of intern work and being an associate somewhere. Then, finally, you can do it. But there is a concept in our church that needs to be there. When Jesus called Matthew He called him right in the middle of his career. When He called Peter he was right in the middle of his career. Every person that Jesus called, with the possible exception of John, who may have been very young, was already launched into their career. Jesus said, "Come and follow Me."

I think, in the Christian church, the pastoral ministry has often suffered because in the stream of pastoral ministry there hasn't been injected enough people that had already been laypersons who know what it's like to sit as a layperson, to work as a layperson, to minister as a layperson. It'd be great to see the Lord moving deacons in our own church into pastoral ministry.

J. "And great confidence in the Lord."

III. There is a function of the Church.

Paul, when he's talked about these officers in the church talks about the functioning of the Church. He says that the Church is the household of God. The Church is a family. It's the Church of the living God.

A. The pillar of the truth and the bulwark of the truth. What does it mean for the Church to be the pillar and the bulwark of the truth? In Ephesus, the city which Paul was writing this letter to, there's a marvelous temple, the temple of Diana. Marvelous in the sense of architecture, but it's a very degraded place. It was known as one of the seven wonders of the ancient world—127 pillars

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adorned the outside of the temple, extremely tall, 30, 36 feet in height. Gilded with gold, jewelry, various designs on it.

Therefore when Paul writes and says the Church is the pillar and bulwark of the truth, right away the readers could associate in their minds what a pillar was. We know that a pillar can serve one of two functions. A pillar can serve as decoration. But a pillar can also hold something up. It may hold a statue or a building. But Paul is saying the Church is two things—the Church is the pillar and it's the bulwark of the truth. It's the buttress which keeps the pillar or keeps the building up. Paul is saying the Church, not the church as a building but as the people of God, we are both the pillar and the bulwark of the truth. Meaning that in the Christian Church, in us, the truth of God and its beauty is seen. In that sense we're the pillar. But we also hold up the truth. We're the bulwarks so that the great mission of the Church is to hold up the truth. To hold up Jesus Christ who is defined as the truth in the beautiful verses that are articulated for us in verse 16—the pillar and bulwark of the truth.

The Church both displays and supports the truth in a world which does not want to see the truth.

The Church is to hold it up.

B. Paul in verse 16 describes the faith of the Church. “Great indeed we confess is the mystery of our religion.” That word “mystery” would have excited those who first heard this letter read to them. They were familiar with the word “mystery” as it was attached to religion. Ephesus and Asia Minor were centers for mystery religions. All sorts of secret kinds of societies which had peculiar sorts of doctrines which you only learned when you were initiated in certain stages and ranks of that particular religion. Be suspicious of any cult or sect that springs trapdoors on you as you work further into it. It's a devious and wrong system.

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So writing to this group he says, “Greatly we confess is the mystery of our religion.” What is the mystery of the Christian religion? It’s no mystery at all now because it’s known. It is evident.

The mystery is simply this: Jesus was manifested in the flesh, vindicated in the Spirit, seen by angels, preached among the nations, believed on in the world and taken up into glory.

The statement of Christian belief which perhaps served as one of the early Christian hymns you’ll find in the revised version of its poetic form. It is thought that in Paul’s writings we find two of the early Christian hymns. One in Philippians 2:5–11, “Let this mind be in you which is in Christ Jesus...” And another time here: “Jesus was manifested in the flesh,” inferring therefore that Jesus existed before His manifestation in the flesh, but now He has come as man. Look at Jesus and you’ll see how God would have lived life and how He did live it. “He’s vindicated in the Spirit,” meaning that Jesus lived a sinless life, performed His mighty deeds. All by the power of the Spirit. And when He was risen from the dead He was risen by the power of the eternal Spirit of God in Him. Raised, as Paul says in Romans, by the Spirit of holiness from the dead. “He was seen by angels” (1 Timothy 3:16). The Christian Church exists not only in a world of people but in a world of spiritual and supernatural beings. “Seen by angels.” Seen at His nativity when they announced to the shepherds the news that He had been born in a manger. Seen by angels when they appeared to strengthen Jesus after His temptation. Seen by angels when, in the Garden of Gethsemane, He sweat great drops of blood and they came to give Him strength. Seen by angels when, on that first Easter Sunday morning, the angels attended to the opening of the sepulcher. Seen by angels when Jesus was ascended into glory. Seen by angels when He comes again in glory.

Paul says, “and preached among the nations and believed on in the world.” Thirty-five years have gone by since the great event of the Resurrection. Already it is possible to say, Jesus has

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been preached among the nations. He's not a Jewish Messiah, not a local Messiah. Not the Messiah of the denomination. He is the international Messiah. The international Savior and He has been believed on in the world. All that the first followers of Christ had to offer the world was the story of the Galilean Carpenter, crucified on a hilltop in Palestine as a criminal. Followed by the witness of His resurrection. Yet, before thirty-five years have passed, the story of that Galilean Carpenter had gone out to the ends of the earth. And Christ is taken up into glory where He is now until we see Him when He returns for us.

This great hymn in verse 16, which is the doctrine of the Church, is the means whereby the Church is the display and the bulwark of the truth. In this beautiful statement we see the glory of the Church and the doctrine which supports the truth.

Closing Prayer

Our Father, today we thank You for Your great love for us and for Your kindness and goodness. We thank You, Lord, that we may become attached to the truth in the person of Christ. I thank You, Lord, for these qualities of Spirit and the leadership of the church which you have indicated for us to be. I confess Lord that there's always a need for us to shoot towards these goals. Sometimes, Lord, we can be very condemned because in one particular area we may fall short momentarily. We thank You for Your great grace which covers us. If comments I've made today have offended anyone today, I pray that in their heart and Your grace there would be forgiveness for this. Lord, we thank You for each person that's here and the witness of Your Word, which is available to all men and to whom You show perfect grace and kindness. I pray especially as well for all of us here who have a need in our own life to move deeper into the area and qualities of the Spirit that You have given. Especially, I pray for marriages and families, for husbands—husbands of one wife. That You would create within the homes of those that are here today and

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in our entire church a quality of love and joy and winsomeness that is a beauty on earth and a wonder to the world. Lord, in our family life may we be the pillar and bulwark of the truth. And Lord, I pray for that great word to come to pass that You do not desire that any should perish but that all should be saved. I think of that phrase that You were manifest in the flesh and vindicated in the Spirit, seen by angels, preached among the nations and believed on in the world. Lord, what is the good of it if You have been believed on in the world but have not been believed upon by us individuals as a person. I thank You, Lord, that there are persons sitting in this service today who have given their lives to You and have believed upon You. I thank You for the fact of that. But I pray also for others who are here who have teetered on the edge of belief, and even now Your Spirit is calling them to yourself saying, "Believe in Me that you might have life and have it more abundantly." I pray for that person in their own heart to make that step and confession in You that would turn their lives completely around to You and to themselves and to others. Thank You for calling us together as a church. We pray, Lord, Your protection and Your blessing upon us that in all we say and do we may give glory to You. Through Christ our Lord, Amen.