

Five Hallmarks of a Biblical Church
Five Hallmarks of a Biblical Church, Part 1
Selected Scriptures

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Well this morning, we're going to turn the page to a different study. We have just completed—for those of you who are visiting today or perhaps who are new to our church and don't this—we've just completed studying through the letter of Paul to the Ephesians: for some three, three-and-a-half years, slowly working our way through that magnificent letter. And we've just finished, and I'm going to take a little break before we start working our way through (Lord willing, in the fall, I'm thinking early September I'll start through) the Sermon on the Mount. Between now and then, I'm going to take a little break and cover some things that have been on my heart. First, starting today, we're going to look (as you can see there in the bulletin) at "Five Hallmarks of a Biblical Church: the Foundation for Life and Ministry in the Church." And then I'm thinking—you know of course there's Easter, and some other things I want to deal with and address—but through the summer, I'm thinking I'll go to world views: how the views around us have influenced and impacted us in our thinking, and how we need to let the Scripture renew our minds. And then as I said, in the fall, Lord willing, we'll look at the longest and greatest sermon Jesus ever preached: the Sermon on the Mount. But this morning, I want us to begin to look at "Five Hallmarks of a Biblical Church."

In the 12th century, some-more than 800 years ago now in London, England, there was founded a company called 'the Worshipful Company of Goldsmiths.' It received a royal charter in the year 1327, and from that time and for hundreds of years, it was called 'the Goldsmiths' Hall. Today, that same organization still exists; in fact, its offices are on the same piece of ground that it has occupied since the 1339 in London, England. This organization exists for one purpose, to fulfill one responsibility. The Goldsmiths' Hall exists to test the purity of precious metals. Metals such as gold and silver, and last century they added platinum to their list of metals that they check into. And this century, they've already added palladium as another precious metal that they will weigh and test. If a piece of metal passes the necessary tests in their offices, if it meets a certain standard for purity, then the Goldsmiths' Hall stamps that piece of metal with an official symbol. That official stamp is called a "hallmark"; in fact, that's where our English word "hallmark" comes from, because the Goldsmiths "Hall" puts its "mark" to indicate that the metal has passed its test for genuineness. It is a mark put by the hall, or a hall-mark. So eventually, the word came to be used of whatever marked something as genuine, or as meeting the standard. That's why I've chosen the word "hallmarks" for our study, because today I want us to begin to

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consider the hallmarks of a biblical church: those qualities, those attributes which mark the church as truly biblical.

I want us to begin our study by turning to 1 Timothy 3:14. Paul writes to his young son in the faith, and here he tells him the reason he's writing. The reason he's writing 1 Timothy—in a very real sense the reason he writes in 2 Timothy as well, and frankly, we could even add the reason he wrote Titus, his little Epistle—but here's it's stated why he wrote in this letter. Verse 14: "I am writing these things to you, hoping to come to you before long." So Paul says, I'm planning to come to Ephesus (where Timothy was stationed as pastor). And he says I'm going to come, but I'm not sure I'm going to be able to come when I thought I was going to be able to come, so just in case I'm delayed, I'm writing you this letter and here's why. Verse 15: "In case I am delayed, I write so that you will know how one ought to conduct himself in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth." The key word in that verse is the word "conduct." The leading Greek lexicon defines the word translated "conduct" like this: "To conduct oneself in terms of certain principles." Paul wrote Timothy so that in case he wasn't able to come to Ephesus when he hoped, Timothy would know the principles by which the church should be conducted, by which he himself should "conduct himself in the household of God, which is the church of the living God": the church that belongs to God and ultimately to His Son.

Now that is a most interesting verse. What does that verse tell us? What is implied in Paul saying that he wants Timothy to understand the principles by which to conduct himself in the church? Well it tells us, that how a particular local church conducts itself matters to Jesus Christ. It matters. Paul was planning to come, but he says I can't even wait until I come. Just in case I'm delayed, I want you to be sure to know how to conduct life in the church, that local church there in Ephesus. Christ is not indifferent about how a local church conducts itself. It matters to Christ. There's another implication in verse 15, and that is, there are wrong ways to do church. I'm going to tell you how you ought to conduct yourself in contrast to the wrong ways. If you doubt that there are wrong ways, read Paul's letters throughout the New Testament as he corrects all kinds of problems in local churches. Or, read the letters from our Lord through the Apostle John in the book of Revelation, where, over and over again, he corrects local churches for how they're doing business, for how they're conducting ministry. There are wrong ways to do church. There's a third implication out of verse 15, and that is, Christians, even Christian leaders, even Christian leaders who accompanied the apostle Paul, don't automatically know how they ought to conduct themselves in the church. They have to be taught. They have to be trained. They have to be told. And here we have it in this letter. A fourth implication is that no church or group of church leaders gets to establish its own guiding principles, its own philosophy for doing church. Now that is completely contrary to the spirit of much of the age in which we live. When some young entrepreneur decides he wants to start a church and he will create it in his own image, he will make it whatever he wants it to be. There's a fifth implication from verse

15, and that is, God has told us how to do church. He's told us here in this letter through the Apostle Paul writing to Timothy there in Ephesus. And we're to conduct ourselves in this way. We're to follow the pattern established by Paul through this letter to Timothy. Clearly, the elders are responsible to make sure the church is run God's way, but so are the members. Remember, the majority of the New Testament letters to churches were written to the entire membership as well as to the leaders. So we are then to learn the principles by which the church is to be conducted. And folks, it matters. It matters to Jesus Christ. It mattered to Him so that He moved the Apostle Paul to write this letter to his young son in the faith—just in case he was delayed.

Now when we talk about how to do church, we are not talking about methodology. You won't find any reference in the New Testament or in the letters to Timothy to particular programs that we should have in place, or not have in place, or a specific way that everything should be done. Instead, what you have in the brilliance of the mind of the Spirit is, Christ here gives His church foundational principles that should shape every church. And the beauty of His plan is that the principles that are here always work. They work whether the church is in America or Angola, whether it's in Savannah or Seattle, Dallas or Detroit. These principles are appropriate whether the church is an urban church, a suburban church, or a rural church. They work whether the church is filled with people who are rich, or whether it's filled with people who are poor, or anything in between. These principles work whether you're talking about a 1st century church or a 21st century church. You don't need to contextualize the message and approach to doing church.

Now, before we look at the principles themselves or the hallmarks themselves, I want to answer the question that may be in many of your minds, and that is, why? Why spend time doing this? Well, there are several important reasons that stand out to me. Let me just give them to you. First of all, I want to do this because I want to lay a foundation for those who are newer to our church family. A few weeks ago when I was finishing up Ephesians, I asked for a show of hands of how many people who have come to our church while I was preaching through Ephesians. Now I know that's been a long time, but a lot of hands went up. There are a lot of folks who are new to our church and who have come from a variety of different churches where these foundational principles may or may not have been followed.

Secondly, I want to do this because I want to reestablish the key principles of a biblical church in *all* of our minds, even those who've been here a long time, to make sure that we're unified together, to make sure that we're all on the same page. Thirdly, I want to equip us to continue to pursue and strengthen these principles in this church. I am not standing up here saying this morning that we, as a church, have arrived. We're on the journey toward these things by God's grace. But we need to know them and embrace them so that we continue to strengthen and pursue these things in the life of this church. Number four: we want to guard and protect this

church from drifting from these moorings. A fifth reason that I think it's important to do this is because we live in a highly transient area; a lot of people move in and move out of the Dallas area. And if the Lord should move you away from this area, I want to help you know what to look for in a good church. It's not uncommon for people who are part of a good church to move and then not know exactly what to look for, and they end up in something less.

A sixth reason that I have in my mind is to establish a legacy for this church, for Countryside Bible Church. Listen, someday the elders and I will no longer be here, and we want the next generation, who are sitting right here in this room this morning, both to understand these things and to insist upon them in future. Because where there's no shared understanding of ministry philosophy, within a single generation, actually within a single pastor's ministry, the church can entirely lose its history. It can quickly be driven by the personality of some new pastor and shaped by his agenda, rather than by an established set of guiding biblical principles. Some of you understand this all too well. Some of you sitting here this morning came to this church because you were part of another church and this is exactly what happened. You were part of a good church with a good history, but a new pastor came and within a short period of time it was a totally different place. How does that happen? Either there are no guiding principles in place, or the leaders and members of the church didn't know those guiding principles, or they simply ignored them altogether. I don't want any of those things to happen here.

But there's a final reason I want to address these things that's more personal to each of us. Each of us, individually, must embrace these principles in our own lives. The elders can establish these principles for the church, but the church, as a whole, is only as strong as its individual members. So our church will only maintain these priorities if you maintain them in your life, and if I maintain them in my life. So those are the reasons I want us to consider these hallmarks, these guiding principles of church life.

What we're really talking about—and I hesitate to use to use this word because it frightens some people—but what we're really talking about is a philosophy of ministry. Every church, without exception, has a ministry philosophy. It may be well-thought-out and carefully articulated, or it may be simply assumed. It may be biblical or it may be based on some entrepreneurial idea, but every church has a ministry philosophy. What is a philosophy of ministry? It is a set of unalterable principles that determines how the ministry of the church will be done. Let me get even more specific. Here's a definition: a biblical philosophy of ministry is a set of nonnegotiable biblical principles that guides all the choices and decisions in the ministry of the church. Let me give that to you again. A biblical philosophy of ministry is a set of nonnegotiable (that's key) nonnegotiable biblical principles that guides all the choices and decisions in the ministry of the church.

So, what are the supporting principles that shape a true biblical church? What are the essential

components of a biblical church's philosophy of ministry? What are the hallmarks, the stamps of genuineness or authenticity of a biblical church? Well, there are three books in our New Testament that we call the pastoral epistles. That's because (we call them pastoral epistles because) they were letters written to pastors to tell them how to do church. Paul wrote two letters to Timothy, his son in the faith, who pastored in Ephesus along with other elders there. He also wrote one letter to Titus, who served on the island of Crete, in the Mediterranean. Both of those men pastors. Letters to pastors, therefore, pastoral epistles: 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus. Woven throughout those three books (as we will see over the coming weeks) are five essential hallmarks or five principles for maintaining a biblical church. I want to give them to you. I'm going to give them all to you, and then we'll come back and look at each one and its implications.

The five hallmarks of a biblical church are number one: a high view of God. A high view of God. Number two: a high view of Scripture. Number three: a biblical view of man. Number four: a biblical view of the church. And finally, number five: the central place of Christ and the Gospel. Look at those five. Those are the hallmarks of a biblical, healthy church: a high view of God, a high view of Scripture, a biblical view of man, a biblical view of the church, and the central place of Christ and the Gospel. Where those are present, where those are the guiding principles, you will have a biblical church. Where any one of those are missing, you will have a church that is somehow lacking in meeting the standard of authenticity. I want to spend the next few weeks developing these five guiding principles.

Today—and this will come as no great surprise to you—I want to begin with just the first one: a high view of God. A high view of God. Now what does that mean when we say the church ought to have a high view of God? A biblical church will have a sense of the majesty of God. The people will be captivated by—and don't be frightened by this word—the transcendence of God. It's a word we don't use a lot, but it's a very important word: transcendence. What does it mean? Let me give you some synonyms. Here's from the thesaurus on transcendent: magnificent, extraordinary, unparalleled, unrivaled, unequaled, unsurpassed, incomparable, unique, superior, supreme, paramount, foremost, utmost, second to none. God is transcendent. He is magnificent. He is extraordinary. He is unparalleled. He is unrivaled. He is unequaled. He is unsurpassed. He is incomparable. There is no category for God. He is His own category. He is elevated and exalted. And a biblical church certainly understands that God is imminent. That's the opposite of transcendent. They understand that God is approachable, that we can have access to God. They understand that you can come to God and call Him 'Father' and 'Abba.' That's His imminence. But a biblical church also understands that He is transcendent, that He is exalted far above us, and, therefore, He ought to be treated with a profound sense of reverence and respect. He ought to—and this isn't a word you'll hear very often in evangelical churches today—He ought to be feared. They understand that nothing about God should *ever* be taken lightly. Paul certainly understood this, embraced this, and portrayed this mindset to Timothy and

the church in Ephesus.

Let me just show you a couple of examples. Look at 1 Timothy, chapter one. Now remember, this is a personal letter from Paul to his son in the faith. In verse 12—and I’m going to come back to this section—but beginning in verse 12 of chapter 1, Paul talks about his salvation and how amazing it is that God saved him. But I want you to notice what happens when he gets to the final thought about his salvation. Notice this little outburst he has in verse 17: “Now to the King.” “Now to the King eternal.” That is, the King of the ages. “Immortal, invisible.” God is a spirit and can’t be seen. “The only God.” There’s no one like Him. He’s in His own category. There are no other gods. To Him “be honor and glory.” And literally he says, into the ages of the ages. Now folks, this is a personal letter. You don’t even hear this in evangelical churches, this kind of language, much less in a letter from one Christian to another. Paul is clearly captivated, captured, by the greatness of God, and he just has this outburst about the greatness of God, and this happens again and again.

I won’t even show you all the examples, but look over at 1 Timothy chapter five. It’s in the context here of challenging Timothy to make sure that church discipline is done fairly and justly, particularly when it comes to the elders: make sure that you don’t show partiality in meting out church discipline. And notice how he breaks into this solemn majesty kind of language. Verse 21: “I solemnly charge you in the presence of God.” And he gives this picture of God and of Christ Jesus and of His elect angels. Timothy, you’re living out your ministry in God’s presence and in the presence of Christ and in the presence of the elect angels. I charge you, I command you, don’t show partiality when you do church discipline.

Look over in 6:13—here’s a very personal section, really. Paul’s charging Timothy to live out his ministry. He’s challenging him to pursue certain things and to fight for the faith. And in the middle of that in verse 13, you see this picture again of the greatness and the majesty and the exalted nature of God. He says, “I charge you (Timothy) in the presence of God, who gives life to all things, and of Christ Jesus, who testified the good confession before Pontius Pilot.” That is, who was willing, even at the risk of His own life, to tell the truth and say, ‘I am the Messiah, I am the King.’ “I charge you in the presence of God... and of Christ Jesus... that you keep the commandment.” Here, probably a reference to all the Scripture—and we’ll come back to this next week, Lord willing:

That you keep the commandment without stain or reproach until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ, which He will bring about at the proper time—He who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and the Lord of lords, who alone possess immortality and dwells in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see. To Him be honor and eternal dominion! Amen.

You just see Paul sitting there writing this letter to his son, to his young son in the faith, and he is captured and captivated by this vision of the majesty and transcendence of God.

Just from those references, you get a picture of how Paul thought about God, and how he taught Timothy to think about God, and how therefore the churches that they created, they founded and pastored thought about God. Certainly, they understood God's imminence. They understood that God is Abba, that He's Father, that He's accessible, that we can go to Him and run to Him for help and care and all of those things, but they were always aware of His transcendence.

When we speak about God's transcendence, what we're really talking about is the attribute theologians call, and the Bible calls, 'His holiness.' His holiness. The concept of holiness is used in the Bible in two related but, ultimately, distinct ways. When we talk about holiness, sometimes we're talking about that God is transcendent in moral purity. He is far exalted in His moral purity. He is absolutely without sin. He can't look upon sin with any favor. He doesn't know, experientially, what sin is. But the other part of holiness is that God is transcendent in majesty. It's this second sense of holiness that we're really talking about when we talk about His transcendence. He is separate. He is distinct from everything else in the universe. It stresses, really, His separateness from us as creatures. God's not like us. Yes, we are created in His image, but He is so far exalted beyond us that He can't fit in the category with us. We are creatures and He is the creator.

Many verses, by the way, mention God's holiness in this context of His majesty, His exalted nature, throughout the rest of Scripture, outside of Paul's letter to Timothy. For example, Exodus 15:11, says, "Who is like You among the gods, O Lord? Who is like You, majestic in holiness, awesome in praises, working wonders?" God, there's nobody like You. You are exalted beyond everything and everyone. First Samuel 2:2, Hannah, in her prayer prays, "There is no one holy like the Lord, indeed, there is no one besides You, nor is there any rock like our God." Holiness means 'nobody like Him.' He can't be compared to anything. And then there's this sobering verse from Isaiah 8:13, spoken to Israel, God's people. And Isaiah says, "It is the Lord of hosts whom you should regard as holy." And then he adds this: "And He shall be your fear, and He shall be your dread." Hosea 11:9, God says, "I am God and not man, the Holy One in your midst." And then He says, I will "roar like a lion" and My sons will "come trembling." As disciples of Jesus Christ, our greatest desire, our first prayer every time we pray, should be that God's transcendence be known and that, therefore, He be both loved and feared- not in the abject sense of horror when you don't want to go near God, but in the sense of understanding that He's God and you're not, and He should be utterly and completely respected and feared. Isn't that what our Lord taught us? You remember in the Lord's Prayer? Matthew 6:9? He says, when you pray, pray like this: "Our Father who is in heaven, (what?) hallowed be Your name." God, may Your great name, may all that's true about You (that's what he's saying), may everything You are and everything that's true about You be set apart and treated as separate, be treated as

holy. So then, every individual Christian and every Christian church should have this as its chief concern, its first prayer, its first priority—may God be treated as separate, as distinct, as set apart, as majestic, as transcendent, as holy. It is a hallmark of a biblical church.

Now that invites the question we need to answer, and that is, how is this high view of God demonstrated in the life of a local church? If that's what it means to have a high view of God, to understand not only that He's imminent, that He's approachable, that He's accessible, that He's nearby, that He's Abba, Father, but that He is elevated and exalted and transcendent—if that's what it means, how is that demonstrated in the life of a local church? When God is set apart, when He is exalted, certain realities will be evident through all the ebb and flow of the church's life. This is not an exhaustive list, by the way, but it's a little list I've put together from this text and others. Let me walk through these demonstrations of a high view of God. When it's present in the church, these things will be present.

Number one: there will be an understanding of the sovereignty of God in salvation. Where there's a high view of God, people will understand that God is sovereign in every way including salvation. Paul gets into this very early in his letter to Timothy. Go back to 1 Timothy 1:1. He sort of strikes it a glancing blow in the very first verse. He writes, "Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus according to the commandment of God our (what?) Savior." Our rescuer. He hints here that, listen, I didn't rescue myself, you didn't rescue yourself. We were in need of rescue, and the one who rescued us was God. It was His work, and of Christ Jesus, who is our hope.

But he really gets to this again down in verse 12, (I told you we'd come back to here.) chapter 1:12. He begins to recount—notice in verse 11, he makes mention of the Gospel with which he's been entrusted, and—and he's amazed that he's been entrusted with the Gospel because of who he is, in spite of who he is. Notice verse 12:

I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has strengthened me, because He considered me faithful, putting me into (His) service, even though (he says I am amazed that God would use me because) I was formerly a blasphemer.

Stop there a moment. (You know, there's a lot of talk today in the church about universalism. That is, that everybody's going to make it. It doesn't matter what you believe, and it doesn't matter, as long as you're sincere, you embrace something. A new book has just come out by an emergent church pastor named Rob Bell, called *Love Wins*, in which he basically takes that view. It's created quite a stir in the blogosphere and around the country. Right here, this word disproves that.) Paul was an avid worshiper of the true God, the God of Israel, and yet what is he called here? What does he call himself? 'A blasphemer.' Why? Because he broke the first half of the commandments. He was a blasphemer because he failed to acknowledge Jesus Christ as Lord. He failed to acknowledge the Son of the true God, and, therefore, he was a blasphemer.

And if God hadn't rescued him, he would have died and gone to eternal hell, and that's true with every other person on the planet. Notice he goes on: "Formally a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent aggressor." He killed Christians, arrested them. "Yet I was shown mercy because I acted ignorantly in unbelief." Paul isn't excusing himself here. He's saying, I really didn't understand who Jesus was and claimed to be, nor did I really understand the Gospel. I was just trying to defend what I thought was the true religion. I thought I was doing God a favor. That's what he's saying.

So how would a guy like that be rescued? Verse 14: It was "the grace of our Lord (that) was more than abundant." It was God. It was His delight to do good to those who deserve the opposite. "With the faith and love which are found in Christ Jesus." Even the faith and love that have become a part of me, he says, or they find their source in Christ Jesus, not in me. "It is a trustworthy statement, deserving full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, among whom I am foremost of all. Yet for this reason I found mercy, so that in me as the worst, Jesus Christ might demonstrate His perfect patience as an example for those who would believe in Him for eternal life." You know what Paul's saying? He's saying listen, if God can save me, He'll save you; I was an example of that. If you doubt that God will take you if you will repent of your sins and believe in Christ, Paul's saying, no, I'm the perfect example that He will. And He saved me for that reason, Paul says.

But then notice where he ends this whole discussion about his salvation. Verse 17, the verse we looked at a few minutes ago: "Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God," to Him and Him alone be the honor and glory for my salvation into the ages of the ages. Paul understood the sovereignty of God in salvation because he had a high view of God. Wherever there is a high view of God, there will be some sense of God's sovereignty in salvation. By the way, you know there's not a high view of God and not a sense of the sovereignty of God in a church when they're all about either subtle or heavy-handed manipulation to get people to respond, when there are endless invitations—let's just sing that eighth verse of "Just As I Am" one more time. You know there's not a high view of God when there are gimmicks to get unbelievers to attend the church, to kind of trick them into coming. When there are gimmicks to get believers to attend, when there is manipulation (subtle or otherwise) to get people to do something, there is a low view of God. Listen, God is big enough to take care of any human heart. He doesn't need my help except to sow the seed of the Gospel, and that's only because He decided to do it that way.

A second demonstration of a high view of God in the local church is, there will be time in the services of the church for real prayer. There will be time in the services of the church for real prayer. You see this hinted at in chapter two. He begins chapter two by saying I want God's people, when they come together, to pray. And then he stipulates how and for whom. But notice 2:8. "Therefore I want the men in every place to pray, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and

dissension.” I want prayer in the right spirit, having dealt with things rightly beforehand. I want prayer to be a part of the life of the church. Compare that to Rick Warren, and his book *The Purpose Driven Church*, who writes this to pastors: “Keep your pastoral prayers short in your seeker services. The unchurched can’t handle long prayers. Their minds wander or they fall asleep.” Compare that to Paul’s admonitions here. Compare that to Paul’s own prayers day and night without ceasing. Listen, where there is a high view of God, there will be prayer. You know why? Because there will be an acknowledgment that I have nothing I need, and God has everything, and so I’m going to ask Him. You remember the first three petitions of the Lord’s Prayer? Where there is a high view of God, there will be prayer, and the prayers will primarily focus not on man and his needs but on God and His glory. The first three petitions of the Lord’s Prayer have nothing to do with us. The first three things we’re to pray for aren’t about us and our needs at all. You remember what they are? “Our Father who is in heaven, (what?) hallowed be Your name. (and) Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.” Only then in the second half of the prayer does Jesus get to our needs. Yes, there’s a place for those, but they’re secondary. There will be prayer and it will focus on God.

Number three: God will be the focus of their worship. Where there is a high view of God, God will be the focus of their worship. If a church is captivated by the transcendence of God, worship will be its chief priority and its worship will center on God. In many churches today, the corporate gathering, the assembly, is not about God primarily. It’s really about people. And when you walk into a church like that—you’ve been in them, I’ve been in them—you can tell right away who the target audience is, and it’s not God. As Rick Phillips said when he was here during our Sola Conference: “We also have a target audience, and we do everything in our services to reach our target audience. It’s just not a human demographic: it’s God.” Where that’s true, God will be an important part of the sermons. He’ll be an important part of the sermon series. Now that sounds like something that’s a given in the church, doesn’t it? But not anymore. Where there is not a high view of God, the focus of the sermons will be on man and on his needs. Ask yourself, if you sit in a church, the amount of time God gets in the sermon. Or closely related to that, what are the sermon series consistently about? If the sermon series in that church are consistently (and that’s the key) about picking a mate, improving your relationships, having your best life now, getting your finances in order, having a better family—whatever it is—then you are dealing with a church that has no sense of the majesty and greatness of God. That church has become anthropocentric: man centered. And as a result, the church reflects a man-centered ministry and a man-centered message that attempts to please man rather than glorify God. It attempts to reach the felt needs of people. You heard that expression? We’re going to do a survey and see what people want, and we’re going to give them that. They want to know more about relationships, so that’s what we’re going to give them. When you focus on felt needs, you will always have a man-centered ministry rather than a God-centered ministry. And I think R.C. Sproul was right when he said, “That approach to ministry is blasphemous.” It substitutes man for God. John Piper, in his book *The Supremacy of God in Preaching*, writes

this: “The grand object of preaching must be the infinite and inexhaustible being of God. Then when preaching takes up the ordinary things of life, such as family and job, leisure, friendships, or the crisis of our day, these things only are not taken up—they are taken all the way up into God.” They’re related to God. Ask yourself, do the messages in that church focus on promoting God and His holiness or on man and his comfort? Look around you. See if God is really the focus of the worship in the singing of individuals involved in singing and worshipping. If the church understands that God is the audience, then they’ll sing to Him. It changes the way they sing. When there’s a high view of God, God will be the focus of their worship.

Number five: the leadership and the people will refer to God with respect and reverence. The leadership and the people will refer to God with respect and reverence. Do people in the church talk about God flippantly or carelessly? Do they casually take His name in vain? Do they joke about Him and holy things? Then there’s a low view of God.

Number six: sin in the leadership and the congregation will be confronted and addressed. Sin will be confronted and addressed. A failure to have a high view of God leads to a toleration of sin. I’m talking about church discipline. (We’ll get to that in a couple of weeks.) Clear, open, unrepentant sin will be regularly tolerated in a church with a low view of God. I’ve been in churches like that, perhaps you have as well—where everybody in the church knows about the sin. The leadership knows about the sin, and nobody does anything about it. It’s not by accident that in both of Paul’s letters to Timothy, Paul refers to church discipline: both of elders who are sinning and of members of the congregation who are sinning.

Number seven: where there’s a high view of God, the church will want everything it does to reflect well on God. Everything’s all inclusive. But can I say, that will even include its facilities? Obviously, the 1st century Christians didn’t have a dedicated building in which to meet. They met in larger homes of people who were a part of the church. But whenever God has commanded or supervised the building of a place for Him to be worshiped, it was always designed to reflect well on Him. Is that not true? Now, don’t misunderstand here. I’m not arguing for a return to temples or cathedrals. Here’s what I am arguing for. I’m arguing, that a church with a high view of God will want everything, including even its facilities, to reflect well on the holiness of God. It will not, intentionally, try to make its facility resemble the lowest level of human life. I’m upset about this because I recently read an article in *Christianity Today* (which is a misnomer), an article entitled “Hipster Faith.” That was the feature cover article: “Hipster Faith.” In the article they described a new trend among many contemporary churches. Listen to the article. *Christianity Today*: “Some churches now hold their services in bars and nightclubs: Mosaic (that’s the name of a church) Mosaic in L.A., meets in the Mayan nightclub; and North Brooklyn Vineyard in New York City, meets in a place called ‘The Trashbar.’” The article goes on to say that even those churches who don’t actually meet in bars and nightclubs, do everything they can to make the space where they do worship resemble that. Now, why would a

church intentionally try to make the place where it meets, either be or resemble the atmosphere of a local nightclub? It's because it has lost all sense of the exalted otherness of God.

Well that's not an exhaustive list, but where there's a high view of God, those seven things will be true. A church that is captivated by God's majesty and His transcendence will always show it, and they'll show it in those ways and others. But now let me get more personal. Let me ask you, do you have a high view of God? Do you really? Do you have a high view of God? Do you hallow God's name? Do you intentionally and faithfully set Him apart in your mind and in your behavior and in your words from the everyday and the mundane? Do you fear God? Again, I'm not talking about in the abject sense of horror, not wanting to draw near God. I'm talking about the realization that He is the King eternal, immortal, invisible, God only wise. Do you fear God?

Well again, let me give you a little list, very briefly. This is not a comprehensive list. Again, I'm going to go through it real quickly. But just ask yourself, are these things true of me? If you have a high view of God in your own personal life, first of all, you will always treat God and everything connected to Him with the highest respect and honor. God, and everything about God, everything that has to do with God (whether it's the church or the Scripture or whatever) you're going to treat with great respect and honor.

Number two: you will not take His name in vain. I read this week that the Oxford English Dictionary is adding several abbreviations to its list of English words. Words that have become popular through the internet and especially through texting. Abbreviations like OMG, standing for "oh my god." Listen, if you have a high view of God, you will not do what He said in the third commandment not to do, and said He would not hold you guiltless if you did.

Number three: if you have a high view of God, you will make time for prayer in your life. Listen, if you understand that God is exalted, that He is the source of everything, every good thing, that you have nothing, then you are going to find yourself often at His feet calling out to Him for what you need, worshiping Him, adoring Him.

Number four: God will be the focus of your Bible study. The Bible is, after all, about God and about His redeeming a people by His Son for His Son to His own glory, and so when there is a sense of the majesty and greatness of God, we look at the Bible and we see God. Listen, let me encourage you to do that. When you're studying the Bible, make a list, either a mental list or maybe to get started with this (I used to do this) actually write it down. Every time the Bible says 'God is something,' write that down; every time it says 'God does something,' write that down. Begin to learn who your God is. The Bible is about God, and your heart will never be satisfied looking for little principles in the Bible. Your heart will only find its joy and satisfaction in the person of the great God we worship and serve. Look for God. And if you

have a low view of God—I'll tell you this—you will skip those sections in the Bible that aren't about you and your life: oh, well that's not me.

Number five: if you have a high view of God, you will aggressively deal with sin in your life. It means when you sin you will confess your sin, and you will seek God's grace each day to live in holiness. The moment you realized you've sinned, stop and confess that sin to God, acknowledge it. And then I don't know about you, but every night—of course I confess my sin through the day—and then at night as I'm recapping the day as I lay on my bed, often (not always when I'm laying on the bed cause I go to sleep right away, but sometimes before that), but I find myself saying to God, 'God, forgive me for those sins,' those sins that stand out as especially egregious through the day. And then almost every evening I pray something like this: 'and Father, help me tomorrow to live more profoundly, more perfectly in the path of holiness; may I be more holy tomorrow than I was today.' Where there's a low view of God, there will be a toleration of sin, a feeding of the sin, even protecting it.

Number six: if you have a high view of God, your desire will be for everything in your life to reflect well on the majesty of God. From how you keep your own person, to how you keep your home, to how you do your job, to how you do your school work. Everything- you will want to reflect on the awesomeness of God by how you live.

Number seven: if you have a high view of God, you will love the truth of God's sovereignty in salvation. It will be a precious, dear thing to you. Because you will realize that left to yourself, you were dead, and if God hadn't intervened, you would have died and spent eternity in hell suffering the wrath of God.

There's one passage that's appropriate for us to end with. Turn to Leviticus chapter ten. I can promise you this. You won't ride past any contemporary seeker-sensitive churches this morning and find this passage as the one they're doing a series on. Leviticus 10:1. "Now Nadab and Abihu, (those are) the (two oldest) sons of Aaron, took their respective firepans." Now understand, these men were sons of Aaron; therefore they were appointed to be priests. They have been given the responsibility of serving as priests. The firepans were simply that, a little pan, in which they would go to the brazen altar where the animal had been sacrificed. They would take some of the coals off of that brazen altar where the animal had been sacrificed, take those burning, live coals into the holy place where there was a table of incense; and there they would combine those coals with the incense, and the smoke of that would go up. And it was to picture the prayers of God's people. This was a duty of the priest. Here Nadab and Abihu are doing this.

"And after putting fire in them, (verse one) (they) placed incense on it and (they) offered strange fire before the Lord, which He had not commanded them." Now, we don't know exactly what

that is. There are any number of suggestions. The two most likely are, one, that they took the fire from somewhere other than the brazen altar where the sacrifice had been made. Or, they may have been inebriated, drunk. Because later in this passage, one of the prescriptions for the priests is that they not be drinking while they're on duty. We don't know, but regardless, it wasn't what they were supposed to do.

Watch what God does in verse 2: "And fire came out from the presence of the Lord and consumed them." Now we don't know what was left, but the bottom line is, they were instantly incinerated. That is, they were instantly killed by fire. "And they died before (the presence of) the Lord." Now look at Moses' commentary. "Then Moses said to Aaron." Now remember, Aaron's the grieving father. He's just lost his two oldest boys—in an instant. Moses says, "'It is what the Lord spoke, saying, 'By those who come near Me (either to worship or to serve) by those who come near Me I will be treated as holy, and before all the people I will be honored.' So Aaron, therefore, kept silent.'" The grieving father kept his mouth shut because he realized his boys had crossed the line. They didn't set God apart in their worship and service. They didn't honor Him in their service. It's a good thing God isn't still sending out fire from His presence today. But understand that God is transcendent, and if we're going to worship Him, if we're going to serve Him, we must have a high view of who He is. Let's pray together.

Our Father, we come to You with a very real sense of Your majesty, of Your greatness. Father, we are so prone to think of You as being like us. What a travesty. What a sin that is against You. Father, help us to remember that not only are You Abba, Father, but that You are the sovereign, eternal King, immortal, invisible, dwelling in unapproachable light. Father, may we, individually, and as a church, serve You with an exalted view of who You are. Lord, don't let us drink at the well of our culture and pull You down from the greatness that is so clearly Yours. May our hearts and minds, our lives and this church exalt You as the great and mighty Eternal One who inhabits eternity. We pray in Jesus' name, Amen.