

Matthew 16:13-18

May 5, 2013

Dr. David Harrell

We return this morning to our series on how to be banished to an island of spiritual infancy. Today we are actually looking at the second part of our study on Satan's strategy for the church. In a few minutes we will be looking primarily at Matthew chapter 16, but we have some other texts that we will look at first.

When Christ died on the cross we know that God conquered death, He conquered sin, and He conquered Satan. In fact, God has put Satan under our feet. In 1 John 4:4 we read, "Greater is He that is in you than he that is in the world." In this we rejoice! But we are also warned in Ephesians 6:11, "Put on the full armor of God so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil." As you will recall in our former study, Satan is methodical, systematic, he is very careful in his plans to thwart the purposes of God. We know according to 2 Corinthians 4:4 that he blinds the eyes of the unbelievers so that they are unable to see the gospel. He offers delicious poisons that appeal to the flesh of all men seducing us to act in ways that seem right, but in the end bring only destruction and even death. He especially targets those who belong to Christ. He tries to tempt us to rebel against God and he relentlessly deceives us with what Paul calls, "doctrines of demons" taught by false teachers. He wants to discourage us, to defeat us. He wants our lives to dishonor Christ, he wants to distort the gospel in all of its purity and replace it with something that is false, counterfeit. These are all part of his careful, cunning, diabolical plan.

Sadly, few Christians take these things seriously. Therefore, it is easy for many believers to fall prey to his deceptions, especially with respect to the kind of church they attend.

Jesus said in Matthew 16:18, "I will build my church". We know also that Satan will build his counterfeit church. If you attend a church like that, you will never grow spiritually if you really know Christ. The hallmark of those kinds of churches will be shallow, man-centered, ear tickling preaching, cotton candy sermonettes. Therefore the people will become spiritually malnourished, they will starve for the glory and the greatness of God. The church will fill up with tares, the church will manifest rampant sin, and for the most part, truth will be determined not by an accurate understanding of the word of God, but by experience or by some self-professed guru.

People that live in these kinds of churches have lives that are filled with chaos and confusion until they finally become so disillusioned with the church that they quit. I know this to be true, I've seen it down through the years, a number of our listeners write in and describe these very things. You will recall in 2 Corinthians 2:11 that Paul was concerned for the church there at Corinth that Satan would not take advantage of them and he warned them that they "are not ignorant of his schemes." The idea is that Satan plots in his mind to effect how we think.

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Later in chapter 11:2-3: "For I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy; for I betrothed you to one husband, so that to Christ I might present you as a pure virgin. But I am afraid that, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your minds will be led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ." In other words, Satan will cause you to shift your loyalties from Christ to all manner of other things. Especially in the context of the church it will be things like rituals, traditions, perhaps politics, social issues, experience, emotionalism, psychology, miracles, Satan and demons, entertainment, numerical church growth and all of those kinds of things.

Later in verses 13 and 14 he says, "For such men are false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. No wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. Therefore it is not surprising if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness, whose end will be according to their deeds."

In part one of this series we examined how Satan deceived Eve by his craftiness. May I remind you of how this works in the church in terms of his strategy to build and bless his kind of church. We learn that how he approaches those who are alone, those who are vulnerable, and he has one purpose, and that is to deceive them, to deceive them in two areas. To deceive them in their understanding of the character of God as well as their understanding of the word of God. He will fill them with lies, he will cause people to question and reject the authority of the word of God especially commands that God gives His people. Including his design for the roles of men and women in family and in the church. Satan's emissaries will be winsome, caring, and knowledgeable. Many times they will know error better than you know truth. Like their father the devil they will appear as an angel of light. Jesus called them wolves in sheep's clothing. In other words they dress up like a shepherd, but in reality they are a wolf.

Even as Satan refused to acknowledge the sovereignty of God when he deceived Eve, he will raise up church leaders that will do the same, and churches that resent the doctrine of God's sovereignty. His church will seduce people into doubting God's goodness and even cause them to question the fairness of his will just like he did with Eve. He will persuade folks to believe there exists a better way, a way that will bring more satisfaction to you because God is too harsh and restrictive. He will cause people to think they need to choose freedom rather than bondage, that the God of the Bible will hold you back and you need to be free to do your own thing, not His. And as he did with Eve, he will try and convince people that God really doesn't judge or condemn people for doing their own thing and that there really is no consequences to rebellion. He will subtly raise up teachers that will come up within the church who will twist the word of God in order to confuse people and then make the word say what they want it to say. He will insert clever half-truths, always in an effort to distort the character of God as well as to reinterpret the word of God. He does this to animate our resentment of God because we need to feel justified in our rebellion against Him.

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He wants people to fall into a state of sin and be estranged from fellowship from God. He wants to confuse naive and undiscerning people with clever counterfeits offering them alternative truths that appeal to the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, the boastful pride of life. This is the same tactic that you will recall with Jesus in the wilderness. Satan will build and bless a church with a philosophy of ministry that will always be man-centered, not God-centered.

His pastors will promote a false gospel of self-esteem, self-fulfillment, self-will and the focus of the entire church will basically be all about you and your needs, not God and His glory. They will lead people to believe that God exists for them rather than they exist for Him. They will convince folks that God is not the final and benevolent authority to be obeyed, but that they need to think of their own ways to pursue spirituality. He will raise up and bless churches that reinforce these kinds of principles, churches that will ultimately exist to make you feel good about yourself.

If you are apart of this kind of church you will find that God will become smaller and smaller, and you will become larger and larger. Your church's theology and worship again will be man-centered not God-centered and you will develop a low view of God and a high view of man. Your church will be filled with phony Christians, and the few believers that are there will never mature in Christ, but will remain in spiritual infancy and not even know it.

All of these things will emerge from the craftiness of Satan and how he deceived Eve. Again, this is what Paul was so concerned about when he said, "I am afraid that, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your minds will be led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ."

Now the best way to spot a counterfeit is to know the real thing and then compare the two. The New Testament is filled with examples of what a true church looks like. But let's focus on the first place in the New Testament where Jesus described the essential elements of the church that he promised to build. Let's turn to Matthew 16 here Jesus describes the church that He will build and bless based on foundational truths that are antithetical to the church Satan wants to build and bless.

It's fascinating as a pastor I receive emails and mailers all the time inviting me to church growth seminars. And many times I will look at the things that they teach. Of course there are various guru's out there that have learned how to do things to draw large crowds and then they call it a church. But what I find fascinating is the things we see emerging from this text and other texts in the word of God, are virtually never discussed in those seminars. There is a huge difference, dear friends, between a crowd and a church. One is an event that honors man, the other is a supernatural organism that honors God—it is the body of Christ.

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In Colossians 1:16 we learn that God created all things to bring glory unto Himself and all through scripture we read how that God is gathering unto Himself an assembly of blood-bought saints. The ekklesia-the called out assembly, literally the church.

In Ephesians 5:25 Paul says, "Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her."

In Matthew 16:18 Jesus says, "I will build My church." My friends this is a priority so exceedingly important that God has exalted Christ as the supreme authority over His church. We read this in Ephesians 1:22 there He says, "He put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all."

Because it is Christ who builds His church, Luke makes it clear that church growth comes from Him, not from man. In Luke 2:47 for example we read, "And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved."

So it is of paramount importance that we understand the nature, methods, and the message of the church Christ has promised to build and bless. Here in Matthew 16:13-28 we discover seven pillars of the church that Christ will build and bless, and we are going to contrast them with the one that Satan devises based on the schemes he used to deceive Eve of which Paul warns. There are seven of them, I will give them to you today, but we are only going to have time for the first one.

Christ will bless a church that:

1. Confesses Jesus as Lord.
2. Devoted to Scripture Alone.
3. Zealous for Kingdom Living.
4. Celebrates the Cross.
5. Aggressively Wars Against Satan.
6. Joyfully Denies Self to Follow Christ.
7. Lives in Light of Christ's Glorious Return.

The New Testament offers many more essentials as part of the church, but they all are built upon these foundational truths.

Now before we look more closely at the text, let me give you the context of Matthew 16.

Many of the Jews, including the disciples during this time, were convinced that Jesus was the Messiah. But they were becoming disillusioned with Him. His popularity was beginning to wane. They were wondering, "If He is the Messiah, why doesn't He overthrow the Romans and establish the kingdom?" What's happening here? The twelve shared that frustration. They saw how they were moving rapidly toward a period of crisis and persecution if things didn't change. Of course, God's plan was right on time and Jesus

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is now going to explain to them how His plan included something very different from what they understood. They did not understand that the immediate establishment of the kingdom on earth was contingent on Israel's attitude toward her Messianic king. For it was to that nation that all the promises and covenants belong, Romans 9:4, for example speaks of that. It is still true to this day.

But Jesus knew that the nation would reject Him. He knew that He was to be, according to Acts 2:23, "delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God." The disciples and the people didn't understand these things. So the inauguration of the glorious earthly kingdom was going to be postponed. Here our Lord encourages them by announcing the building of something new, a new thing, the church—a body of those that He has redeemed and in whom He has invested with special authority in the future kingdom of Heaven. He was going to explain to them that the Messiah king is preparing them for what we would call the Interregnum. Interregnum is a period of time where a kingdom is without a ruler. So He is preparing them to understand these great truths.

Now you will recall that prior to this believers had been sent out, two by two, you read about that in Mark 6. They were to announce to the "house of Israel" that the long-awaited kingdom of heaven was at hand. You can read about this for example in Matthew 10:1-7.

Now as they returned to Christ, He is asking them for a report, and that takes us to Matthew 16:13: "Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi He began asking his disciples saying, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" The Son of Man was one of the Lord's favorite ways of expressing Himself, His favorite self-designation. That is the title taken directly from Daniel's great prophecy of the Messiah and His future kingdom in Daniel 7:13-14.

In verse 14 notice what they say: "And they said, "Some say that you are John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; but still others, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets."

I might add that this is typical of false professors in Satan's church today. They will always define Jesus in ways that is short of deity. You see this all the time in the cults like Jehovah's Witnesses, or the Mormons.

Verse 15-18, He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God. And Jesus said to him, "Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is in heaven. "I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it."

Beloved, here is the first and most important pillar of a true church. Number one, *It will confess Jesus as Lord.*

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The foundation of the church is the revelation of God through His apostles that indeed He is the Christ, the Son of the living God. Christ in the original language "Christos" means the "anointed one." This is the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew Messiah. Then he says, "the Son of the living God," this refers to God incarnate that has come to reveal God, redeem men, and rule over God's kingdom. That is who You really are.

Later Thomas would see the risen Christ and declare in John 20:29, "My Lord and my God."

Paul tells us in Philippians 2:6-11: "God has highly exalted Him, (referring to the Lord Jesus) and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name" (that is the name LORD—the sovereign ruler, the name Satan hates) That at the name of Jesus every name shall bow, of those who are in Heaven, and on earth, and under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord." In other words, even those who have rejected Him will be forced to acknowledge that indeed Jesus Christ is the Lord and Master of the universe that He has created. He will also be the judge of all who have rejected Him.

Now my friends I find it fascinating to see that the first thing Satan denied is the first thing God affirms, that He is Lord. He is the self-existent, self-dependent, Almighty Sovereign who rules with unfettered liberty over His creation.

Again, recall Satan's first question in Genesis 3:1: "Indeed, has God said". He uses the term "Elohim-the generic term for God. He would not acknowledge Him as YHWH ELHOHIM, "LORD God". YHWH being God's personal and covenant name that denotes His sovereignty. No, Satan omitted that because he despises that name, even though the designation "LORD God" has been used repeatedly since Genesis 2:4. And as I mentioned the last time we were together, it is used 6,400 times in the Old Testament. By the way, the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament, uses "Lord" (kyrios) in the original language to translate YHWH. This emphasizes the superior position, as that of a master of a slave.

Now, it's important for you to understand all this in light of Old Testament history. So I want to take you back and look at some things that I think will help clarify ultimately what is happening here in this text.

You will recall that God revealed Himself to Moses in the form of an amazing theophany at the burning bush on Mt. Horeb, which was called "the mountain of God". We read about this in Exodus 3:1-10. There God called Moses to be the first in a long line of mediatorial rulers in the nation of Israel after his long apprenticeship as a shepherd. The burning fire in the tree pointed not only to the chastening that the Israelites were experiencing in the fires of adversity in Egypt, but more importantly to the consuming fires of retribution that were about to come upon Pharaoh and the gentile nation.

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On that occasion God revealed Himself to Moses as "I AM THAT I AM", Exodus 3:14. In other words, "I am the one who is and who will be." This is a name that denoted His self-existence, His eternality, and His utter sovereignty over all that exists. He wanted Moses, as well as the Israelites who had only heard of Him through the stories of their ancestors, to know that He is the God who *IS*. He is not a God that is far off, not the God of some distant past, but He is the one who is ever present, the One who will act on their behalf and in fulfillment of His covenant promises. So this personal name of God was designated by the Hebrews as YHWH, and you will see it translated "LORD" in the Old Testament, many times called the tetragrammaton, the four letters.

There at that burning bush, we see that God authorized Moses to become the first mediatorial ruler of Israel. We see this affirmed in a number of passages, especially Acts 7:35. He would be the one who would now represent YHWH to the people. In this official capacity Moses became a type of Christ. Christ who would eventually be the perfect embodiment of God's mediatorial ruler in the final phase of the kingdom when that will be established on earth when the Lord returns and pours out His blessings on all the nations of the earth.

I want you to think of the amazing parallel between the supernatural preparation for the first kingdom in history under the rulership of Moses, and the last kingdom, the future millennial kingdom of our LORD JESUS CHRIST.

The first preparation included elements such as an insolent mocking of YHWH by Pharaoh and the Gentile powers. Pharaoh thought that he was the mighty sovereign. There was an utter hatred of Israel, the covenant people of God. Then we see the supernatural plagues of judgment. We see the total defeat of the Gentile armies resulting in the deliverance of God's people and the establishment of the first mediatorial kingdom on earth, the theocracy of Israel.

Today we are seeing the beginnings of the second preparation for the coming kingdom. We see once again an insolent mocking of YHWH by the gentile powers. We see an utter hatred of national, ethnic Israel who today are God's beloved enemy who He has promised to reconcile unto Himself, the covenant people of God.

We know according to Bible prophesy that just before God's judgment upon the nation's that we read about, for example in Revelation 6 through 18, there will be an infinitely greater miracle than the deliverance that happened in Egypt in those days and that will be the miracle of God snatching away His bridal church.

Then, as in the days of Egypt, YHWH, the convenient making and keeping, the sovereign God of all things, the God of Israel, will judge the antichrist and his armies at Armageddon and He will once again deliver his people Israel, only this time He will establish His messianic kingdom upon the earth for a thousand years. This will be the consummating bridge between human history and the eternal state.

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Folks do you get the idea that God is serious about the exaltation of His name? That He is the Lord?

Let me give you another example out of the Old Testament in Ezekiel 38-39 we read of the furious judgment that God is going to pour out upon the nations that unite together to destroy Israel. We see all of this happening right before our eyes today. Repeatedly in Ezekiel 38 and 39 we read the phrase, "Thus says the Lord GOD". In chapter 38:23 he says, "And I shall magnify Myself, sanctify Myself, and make Myself known in the sight of many nations; and they will know that I am the LORD" (YHWH)

At the conclusion of His supernatural annihilation of the vast forces that will come upon Israel He says in chapter 39:7-8, "and they will know that I am the LORD. And My holy name I shall make known in the midst of My people Israel and I shall not let My holy name be profaned anymore. And the nations will know that I am the Lord, the Holy One in Israel, 'Behold, it is coming and it shall be done,' declares the Lord God."

No what is the point of all this? It's simply this folks, Satan knows all of this and he is absolutely apoplectic with rage because of it.

From the very beginning he wanted to be like God. He tried to establish his earthly kingdom at Babel. He is trying right now to establish it in the same region. He's trying to destroy Israel in an effort to halt the fulfillment of the Abrahamic and Davidic Covenant. If there is no more Israel, there is no more covenant people of God which God will reconcile and make a kingdom. He wants to prevent the establishment of the Messianic kingdom.

Right now, we know, that he is preparing the world for the antichrist, for the false prophet. He is building a political and a religious Babylon described by the prophet Daniel for example and in the book of Revelation. Yet most Christians live as if He doesn't even exist because their minds have been led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ. Sadly many Christians attend churches that never teach these things because Satan doesn't want us to know these things. Dear friends, don't miss this, Satan hates the fact that Jesus is Lord and he will do anything and everything in his power to strip Him of that title. Especially in your life, in your family, and in your church. *He* wants to be your master and rule over you through the world systems that God allows him to currently—and I might add, temporarily—govern. That is why he has gone to such great lengths down through redemptive history to destroy Christ, destroy Israel, and destroy the church.

This is the ultimate conspiracy theory, isn't it? But this is far more than a theory, this is the word of God. Make no mistake, the kind of church that Satan wants to build and bless will deny the Lordship of Jesus Christ—the bedrock confession upon which Jesus Christ will build His church. We know biblically, to submit to the Lordship of Christ is what



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really validates genuine saving faith. We read for example in 1 Corinthians 12:3, "no one can say, 'Jesus is Lord,' except by the Holy Spirit." That is part of the new birth.

Practically speaking, Satan will raise up cults and churches that flat out deny the deity and the Lordship of Christ, but he will also raise up churches that affirm Jesus as Lord, when in fact they don't really mean it.

Satan doesn't mind you calling Him Lord as long as you don't serve Him as Lord. This has been true from the very beginning.

When God gave the law to Moses to the Israelites, the Israelites were absolutely terrified by the spectacle of His glory and His greatness and they vowed to obey the Lord, fearing that He would consume them with fire that they saw coming from the mountain.

In Deuteronomy 5:28 the Lord says to Moses, "I have heard the voice of the words of this people which they have spoken to you. They have done well in all that they have spoken. Oh that they had such a heart in them, that they would fear Me and keep all My commandments always, that it may be well with them and with their sons forever."

You see God knew their weaknesses as He knows ours. My friends, it is one thing to pledge loyalty to the Lord, it's another thing all together to fulfill that pledge. Obviously the Lord knew the nature of their hearts, because soon after that we that they were so influenced by the polytheistic culture of that day that they went out and built a golden calf and worshipped it, they made sacrifices to it and they called it YHWH. What did they do? They distorted the character of God and they rebelled against the word of God. That's always Satan's strategy. Again, Satan doesn't mind you calling Him Lord as long as you don't obey Him as Lord.

What did the Lord say in Matthew 7:21, "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven; but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven."

Churches are filled with folks who give lip service to the Lordship of Christ. They will say, "yes indeed He is the sovereign master of my life and I am willing to be obedient to Him as His loving slave." Yet you look at their lives and there is a great disconnect. But we know that genuine faith will produce genuine obedience. We read in Luke 6:44, "a tree is known by its fruit." You say you're an apple tree, then let's see the apples.

For this reason, Jesus asked his lip service disciples in Luke 6:46, "Why do you call Me, 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I say?" The answer is because you're a hypocrite, you're disingenuous, and Satan loves to fill churches with these kinds of people. In fact we know that one of his great tasks is to sow tares amongst the wheat. Jesus describes this for example in Matthew 13:25. According to Matthew 7 Jesus tells us that most of those who call themselves Christians are not. There are the "few" and the "many."

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Let me give you an example of how this plays out today. We see this all the time in the modern church marketing movement where there is an emphasis on the contextualization of the gospel. Often you will hear people say, "We are trying to reach the unchurched." That sounds noble and I believe in many cases their intentions are sincere. But what this often translates into is, "let's become like the world in order to win it." There is an underlying attitude that says the gospel is really not powerful enough on it's own, so we have to do something to make it more powerful. God cannot accomplish His redemptive work apart from our creative methods, so we need to study the culture and the tastes of the secular world that hates Christ then somehow adapt the message and the very nature of the church to appeal to them. Folks, I would humbly submit to you that you just don't see this emphasis anywhere in the New Testament.

Someone has well said, "When the church caters to the unchurched the church will unchurch the church."

I see this all the time. Again I think most of the time these are well-meaning folks, and many people that go to these kinds of churches are tired of dead churches that they have attended. They are seeking some new, an exciting alternative. And that is good and commendable, but unfortunately I fear that these kinds of churches are not a biblical alternative. These churches especially appeal to young people because they function like the pop-culture youth groups that are indicative of churches in our day. Groups that have proven to be inept in making real disciples of Christ, but great at producing a high energy crowd committed primarily to social relationships, but they really don't develop a deep, intimate relationship with the Lord.

This is what Thomas Bergler defines as "juvenilization": "the process by which the religious beliefs, practices, and developmental characteristics of adolescents become accepted as appropriate for Christians of all ages. It begins with the praiseworthy goal of adapting the faith to appeal to the young. But it sometimes ends badly, with both youth and adults embracing immature versions of the faith."

Now, many well-meaning brothers who have bought into these philosophies will claim that this is what Paul did when he spoke to the Athenian philosophers on Mars Hill in Acts 17:22-34. But I would submit that just because Paul used the Athenian's ignorance in worshipping an unknown god as an opportunity to introduce the One True God is hardly an example of the kind of contextualization we see in "seeker sensitive" churches. Paul went on in that passage to boldly proclaim the unvarnished truth of the Gospel and call them to repentance.

But the favorite passage used to justify contextualizing the gospel is 1 Corinthians 9:22-23, where Paul wrote, "I have become all things to all men, that I may by all means save some. And I do all things for the sake of the gospel, that I may become a fellow partaker of it." But friends, to say that Paul was somehow advocating some form of "gospel lite" to appeal to sinners or that he was asking the church to employ certain kinds of gimmicks

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and entertainment to appeal to spiritual cadavers, stretches the principles of biblical hermeneutics to the breaking point.

Paul was calling for personal sacrifice on the part of the evangelist with respect to Christian liberties when witnessing to various cultures. He even said in that text (figuratively) he had become "a slave to all."

He never shaped his message to somehow accommodate anyone. What he did was set aside his personal preferences, even altered his lifestyle so he would not be a stumbling block and offend the vastly different cultural sensitivities of the unbelievers in his day. We should do that even to this day. I would submit to you, if Paul was such a great example of removing the offense of the cross in the gospel to accommodate his listeners and draw bigger crowds and produce a more desirable response, then why was he so persecuted? He was stoned, left for dead, beaten, imprisoned, eventually he was executed.

Paul was no contextualizer. His message and his life never *conformed* to the culture, it always *confronted* the culture. He was willing to sacrifice himself to gain an audience with vastly diverse cultures, but he was absolutely unwilling to sacrifice the message. The apostle Paul was no people pleaser. He wrote in Galatians 1:10, "Am I now seeking the favor of men, or of God? Or am I striving to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a bond-servant of Christ."

He said in 1 Corinthians 9:16, "I am under compulsion for woe is me if I do not preach the gospel." He never advocated imitating the world. But he did call the church to imitate him because he imitated Christ (1 Corinthians 4:16). Satan hates that in the leaders of a church because he does not want there to be any focus on the Lordship of Christ. He wants leaders that will mirror the world; because he wants a church that will imitate the world. 3 John 11 we read, "Beloved, do not imitate what is evil, but what is good. The one who does good is of God; the one who does evil has not seen God."

John MacArthur says, "By all means we are to seek the salvation of the lost. We must be servants to all, deferential to every kind of person. For Jews we should become Jewish; for Gentiles we should be like Gentiles; for children we should be childlike; and so on for every facet of humanity. But the primary means of evangelism we dare not overlook: the straightforward, Christ-centered proclamation of the unadulterated Word of God. Those who trade the Word for amusements or gimmicks will find they have no effective means to reach people with the truth of Christ."

Again, what Satan loves to do is build and bless a crowd and then call it a church, then that group of people will look and act like the world. He loves worship services, for example, that appeal to the lust of the eye, the lust of the flesh, the boastful pride of life (1 John 2:16). All of this of course is not from the Father but from the world.

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Christ said that He is going to build His church upon that confession; that Jesus is the Christ, the son of the living God. But Satan wants to make a mockery of that confession. So he will build a church that will over-contextualize the message and the nature of the church, causing it to conform to the culture. They will circumvent doctrinal precision, they will criticize Christian purity, and they will ultimately create a religious social club filled with tares and call it a church.

For those committed to evangelical pragmatism, and some of the more extreme forms of contextualization, I would humbly ask you to consider once again what Paul said in 2 Corinthians 11:2-3: "For I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy; for I betrothed you to one husband, so that to Christ I might present you as a pure virgin. But I am afraid that, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your minds will be led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ."

If your going to appeal to the culture by offering some kind of service in which they feel comfortable, then call it an event, but don't call it a worship service. If the offense of the gospel is removed, if Christ is not exalted, if His word is not valued and taught in depth, if the word is not the sole source of faith and practice, if you have absolutely no commitment to equipping the saints with doctrinal precision, if you have no passion for the purity of the church as Jesus did, if you refuse to discipline sin as Jesus commanded, then don't call yourself a church! Call yourself a club or gathering, maybe some kind of an evangelist event, because you are not a church by New Testament standards. A true church gathers to worship and be equipped, and be edified, and then scatters to evangelize. That's how you reach the unchurched; you equip the saints so they will do the work of the ministry and they go out and spread the gospel. Don't adapt your worship services to accommodate the lost. All that will do is fill a church with tares and it will dumb down the word of God to a point where the saints are so malnourished that they will become undiscerning children tossed here and there by every wave and every wind of false doctrine.

I fear that many true believers in those kinds of churches have been so over-contextualized that they love the world more than Christ. Paul said in 2 Corinthians 5:9: "Therefore also we have as our ambition, to be pleasing to Him."

Now in closing, I understand the importance of adapting the form of a church to match a particular culture, but friends the message and over all methods and nature of a church must remain faithful to Scripture, or it's no longer a New Testament church.

When the Lord is pleased to bring unsaved people into our worship services, I want them to feel loved, but I don't want them to feel at home. Because I want them to feel the truth. And that is we are worshipping the very one with whom they are at war. The wrath of God abides upon the one that has come in, and we are worshipping Him. I want people to come into our worship services where Jesus is Lord. I want them to hear the preaching of the word and the singing of the saints and be convicted and be saved. This is what Paul

Matthew 16:13-18

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Dr. David Harrell

described in 1 Corinthians 14:24 where he says that when the word is rightly divided, "and an unbeliever or an ungifted man enters, he is convicted by all, he is called to account by all; the secrets of his heart are disclosed; and so he will fall on his face and worship God, declaring that God is certainly among you."

Beloved this is how Christ builds His church; it's based on the Lordship of Christ. That is where you begin. This is the very opposite of the way Satan will build his. If you are part of a church that is like the one that I've described with respect to one that Satan loves to build and bless, then I would humbly submit to you that Satan has taken advantage of you and your ignorant of his schemes and you have been banished to an island of spiritual infancy, unless you get out of that kind of an environment. Commit yourself to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. Become a part of a church that truly exalts Him so that you will grow in the grace and knowledge of Christ. Then you will find in Him your greatest joy and your supreme delight, because He is indeed Lord.

Let's pray together. Father thank you for these truths. I pray that they have been spoken in love but also with clarity and with conviction. Lord we know that we fail as a church in so many ways, but Lord you know our heart. We love you as our Savior. We obey You as our Lord, even though imperfectly, but Lord that is the passion of our heart. May You be exalted in our lives, in our families, in our church, so that a lost and dying world will see Jesus as Lord. I ask this in Jesus' name and for His sake, amen.