

United We Stand

John 17:20-23; Philippians 2:3-5, 14-15, 3:1-2

Dr. Matt Cassidy --- September 27, 2020

Glad you could join us today. Was that music just, wow, way beyond amazing? I love how they change the sound and make it so beautiful.

And I just want to add to those announcements—the truth be told here—at the men’s little get-together we have some “friendly competition”—the last time I went to a men’s thing and we had “friendly competition,” it got boring fast. And the next thing you know, there were four guys at the bottom of the courtyard with their hands behind their back and people launching water balloons at them, like catapults. So, we’ll see how long it stays friendly. Then it starts to get dangerous, and that’s why we come. Don’t miss that event.

Well, good morning. Listen, I don’t know what to tell you about. I feel like we needed to break from our series where we’re going through the Bible this year. I was trying to figure out some emotion that we would attach to why we’re doing this. There are a lot of reasons, but I don’t know if it’s grief or sorrow. It has to do with when you look around the country, and I don’t know if it helps, but the people who have been around here longer, it maybe hurts them deeper, because it hasn’t been like this in a very long time. With the divisions in family and government and even with the potential of churches in disarray, it is so strange. You can’t make a single mistake anymore, you can’t tell a joke. There’s no grace. There seems to be no bottom to what people will stoop to in order to attack another human being. They probably don’t even know.

And even things that were once considered important, like logical fallacies, are disregarded by people that should know better, people like the academy and politicians and people in the media. It’s like they’re getting paid for how many fallacies they can violate in one tweet.

And it’s having a very profound effect on people’s souls.

This, by the way, independent of the global pandemic ... all of that. I feel like there’s a heaviness around us.

And I don't get very many sermon requests. People don't say very often that I ought to teach on something--except for the people that want me to teach on Revelation, and I just say, "No, I don't understand it." I was supposed to take a class this summer at Regent College, a grad class, on Revelation, and then COVID killed that, so I don't have to preach on Revelation. So, that's a good thing.

But a number of people that I really respect have come to me and said, "You know that one sermon that you give that's part of our core curriculum that just teaches us how to get along and stay unified and keep things friendly? I bet this would be a good time to do that."

And when I looked back in my notes, the plan was to do that sermon about every five years, and it's been six years. So, maybe it's just time, but especially right now.

And because I have customized that sermon that we give every five years for this particular expression, I have added five sermon series to it. So, this is going to be a full sermon. And what I thought I'd do is put my manuscript on the web as soon as I can, and when Christi is able to make it a transcript, she'll put it on the web, because there will be a lot of resources for homework and how to look up things, and you'll want to be able to do that so you won't have to take too detailed notes. So, I'm providing the notes for you. It's going to happen pretty fast today.

It starts like this. Here's the big picture. How did we get where we are and how do we fix this?

Three Sacred Gifts from God

The first thing to understand is that God has gifted us with three sacred things to make the most for the purpose of the fullness of man and the glory of God.

Now "sacred"—don't be afraid of that word—it's means "to be set apart for a purpose." "Sacred" means to be put over there for a special reason. And the reason and the purpose that God gave us these three gifts is so that man could be fully actualized and God would be glorified. So, in order, here are these gifts.



FAMILY



GOVERNMENT



CHURCH

Family

One: the family. In Genesis chapter 2, God gives the family to humankind. And it is in the context of a family that we get to understand how to know other people and how to be known. It's in the context of the family that we learn how to love and we learn how to be loved. In the context of the family we learn the mysterious power of parental love. And when we work in a family with unity, because of humility, it's beautiful.

Government

The second gift God gives us is found in Genesis chapter 9. It is government. In Genesis chapter 6, before the flood in the Noah story, it says this: "And the Lord Yahweh saw that the wickedness of man was great on all the earth. Every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually."

This is what happens when men are allowed to do whatever they want. Now, after the flood, it begins like this. Government is given to mankind for the purpose of the fulfillment of what mankind could be and the glory of God. It glorifies God when we protect the innocent and punish evil justly. The purpose of government is to protect the innocent and punish evil justly.

And that glorifies God. And when the government works in unity, through humility, it's a glorious thing.

Church

So, we have the family, the government, and finally, we have the Church, the bride of Christ. It is not a means, it is an end. She is the means by which—it's both, the means and the end—the means by which the Holy Spirit is going to use the bride to bring the kingdom of God to all mankind; to bring the good news to all people, so that all people can become like Christ in all of life. And how does the Church work? It works humbly, unified through humility.

So, in summary, these three gifts. When any one of these gifts is working in humility so that they can be unified, oh, it's a sweet taste, it's a blessing. If all three are working together the way they were meant to be and designed, it is heaven on earth. It's the way things were meant to be. It's glorious, and it's glory to God.

Now, what we see today is division in these three things. We're seeing families torn apart, we're seeing the government, like it never did work all that well together, but we say, *Wow, not like this!* And churches are extremely stressed in these strange times.

Here's another truth. We're going to have a lot of truth today. What it takes years to build for the glory of God, it only takes a second to burn to the ground—to the glory of the devil.

How Disunity Happens in the Church

Now today, what I'd like to do is, keeping in mind these three sacred gifts that God gives us—I'm going to start off by applying what we can learn about how we get in a place of division in the Church. I'll just explain that as it applies to the Church, especially our church. And then I'm going to add those other four sermon series that I've already done and apply them to our whole culture and maybe into our families as well.

Before I move on to some of those other things, I want to stop and pause. Everything's great here at Grace Covenant Church. I'm not doing this because things are crazy here or we're having any kind of issues. Actually, there's a lot of harmony going on here. We have unity in every kind of structure that we have going here. This is just a sermon that we do every five years and it's especially needed today in the other two areas of family and government.

So, in the context of church now—we'll apply it to the Church and to the other two later—but in the context of church, God is glorified in the Church, with His bride, when people are humble and unified. And is it any wonder that Jesus Christ, because of that, prays for us, His last prayer, for His disciples and for all the disciples that will come after, for unity. He prays for the unity of the Trinity for you and for me.

John 17:20-21, 23

My prayer is not for you alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message,²¹ that all of them may be one, Father, just as You are in me and I am in You. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that You have sent me.²³ I in them and You in me—so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that You sent me and have loved them even as You have loved me.

Look at what it says in John 17: Jesus says, “My prayer is not for the disciples alone. I pray also for those who will believe.” That’s me and you. “... who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as You are in me and I am in You. May they also be in us, so that”—here’s the purpose—“so that the whole world may believe that You have sent me.” Here it is again. “I in them and You in me—so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world would know that You sent me and have loved them even as You have loved me.”

His prayer for us is that we would be so unified that the whole world would know because of our unity and humility. People would be drawn to that. No matter what, Jesus prays for humility and unity.

No wonder Paul does that. In almost every one of his letters to the churches, he says, *Be unified through humility*. As a matter of fact, a classic expression of that is in the Book of Philippians. The church at Philippi is probably his favorite church because they get along so well, because they’re so humble towards one another. And even in the context of that church that’s doing quite well, thank you, he says this to them: *Stay unified. Keep working as a team. Here’s how it works.*

Philippians 2:3-5

Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, ⁴ not looking to your own interests, but each of you to the interests of others. ⁵ In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus ...

“Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. But rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking at your own interests, but each of you to the interests of others. In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset that was in Christ Jesus.”

Philippians 2:14-15

Do everything without grumbling or arguing, ¹⁵ so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a warped and crooked generation. Then you will shine among them like the stars in the sky.

And look at the power of this humility. Look what it produces. He says, “Do everything without grumbling or arguing, so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a warped and crooked generation.” There it is. That’s us. That’s what’s going on right now. “Then you will shine among them like stars in the sky.”

The Church, the bride of Christ, has the potential of shining like stars in the dark contrast of a wicked world that’s going on around us. And so, Paul prays for unity, for humility. Let’s serve one another. Let’s ask the other person what they need. Then we’ll get to our needs after that. Right.

Now watch this, though. Watch this. After all that talk about humility and unity, watch how Paul in the turn of a page—when he goes from chapter 2 to chapter 3 of the same book, in the Book of Philippians—watch how he goes from a teddy bear to a grizzly bear. Look what he says when he talks about the doctrine of salvation. It’s like, you’re in or you’re out. There’s not unity here.

Philippians 3:1-2

Further, my brothers and sisters, rejoice in the Lord! It is no trouble for me to write the same things to you again, and it is a safeguard for you. ² Watch out for those dogs, those evildoers, those mutilators of the flesh.

Chapter 3, verses 1 and 2: “Furthermore, my brothers and sisters, rejoice in the Lord! It is no trouble for me to write the same things again to you, and it is a safeguard for you. But watch out for those dogs, those evildoers, those mutilators of the flesh.”

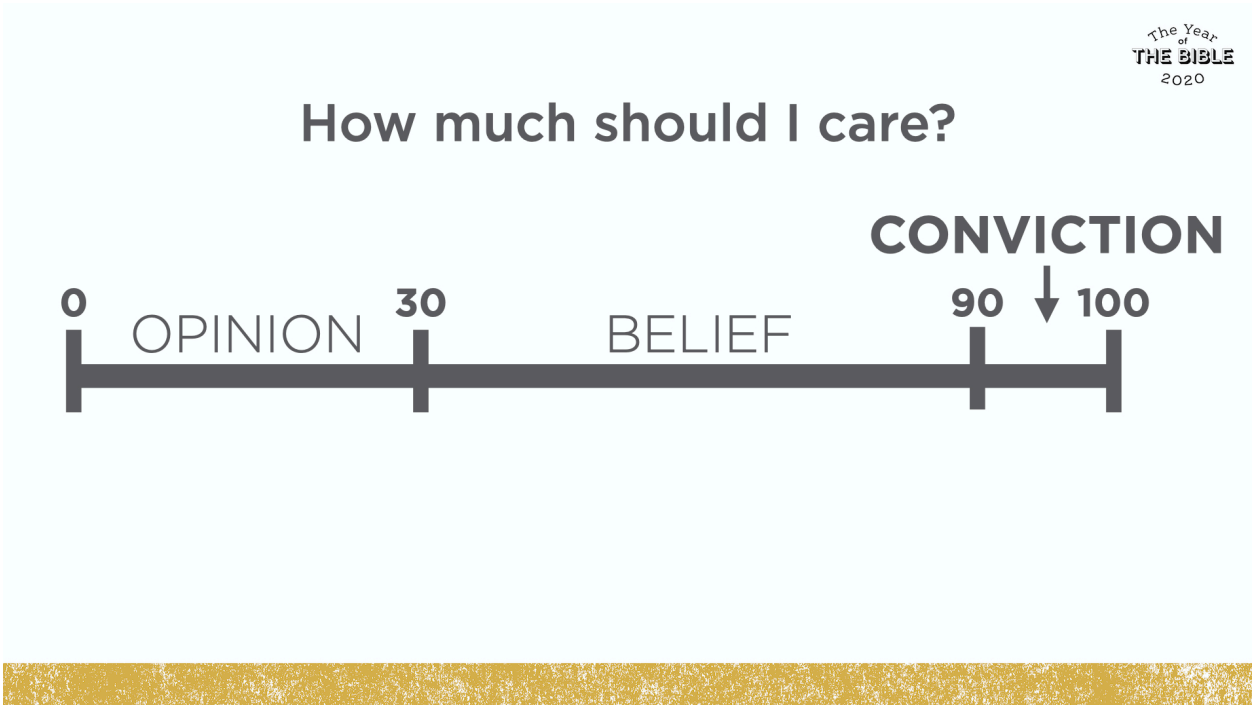
There was a big hug and then there was this warning. Wait a minute—I mean, he calls these people dogs. Any culture calling a person a dog is not a good thing, but especially in a Jewish culture it’s bad to call someone that. He’s calling them names. Where’s that humility now, Paul? Where’s that big hug we had in chapters 1 and 2?

Here’s how to answer that question. Unity is a very high priority in a church. It’s just not the highest priority. There is a higher priority than unity, and that is the truth of various doctrines. And in this particular situation, the issue was the doctrine of salvation by a gift, by the grace that comes in Jesus Christ, through faith alone in that gift. And if anybody comes in there and says it’s anything but by grace through faith, those guys are dogs. They’re going to have you working for their salvation. Don’t be unified with them. In other words, it’s not unity at any cost; there are some things that matter a lot more than others.

The reason I bring that up is the power of unity and the purpose of unity, but also there are some things that matter more. And that’s what happened here at Grace twenty years ago. The reason we’re doing this sermon every five years (and this is the fourth time we’ve done it) is because twenty years ago we were having a lot of trouble with the church with disunity. And we were arguing with each other. And what we found out is that we actually agreed on a lot of things. We didn’t know how to make sense out of it. So, one of the guys on staff said, “Wait a minute. I had to read a chapter in seminary that deals exactly with this topic.” He brought that chapter and we all read it as a leadership group and said, “Let’s turn it into a sermon, let’s put it into our core curriculum in the pulpit. Let’s help everybody understand how to make sense out of division by defining various categories.”

And so, that's why we're hearing the sermon today. One of the reasons we're so unified today is because we use this sermon and these three terms regularly and purposefully around Grace Covenant. It's become our nomenclature.

Chart: How Much Should I Care?



There are three key categories. Let's start with this. Picture, if you would, a chart. It's just a line chart. And the name of the chart is "How Much Should I Care?" There it is. You can write it down on something if you like. How much should I care?

On the far left side—that's zero—you shouldn't care any. That's the "Who cares?" And then all the way over on the far right is the one hundred. That's something that you would give your life for.

So, there are **opinions** way over here on the far left. There are **beliefs** that are scattered throughout the middle. And at the very end, **convictions**—those three words. Let's study those and see how they apply to our lives.

And here's a value—really, one expression of maturity is this: that you care less and less about more and more. Things just slide over here as you get older—not older, sorry—more

mature. You care less and less about more and more. And then you care more and more about less and less. Not a lot over here [points to the left of the chart], but you really care about these things [points to the right of the chart].

Now let me define some of these terms so that we can help illustrate that. I brought the same three props that I've had for I don't know how many years now—actually, seventeen years I've been doing this. And the first one has to do with opinions.

Opinions

Opinions: score them zero through thirty, and they're entirely based on taste. They're aesthetic in nature. It's just kind of what makes you feel good. And the icon for that is this right here, my favorite pizza. [On the first stool Matt lifts the lid to a Conan's Pizza box.]



Conan's pizza. I love this pie, friends. I've made decisions based on this pizza company. I used to go there when I was at the University of Texas. There was one on the drag and I would save up and I would buy that pizza. It's a deep dish, Chicago-style, whole wheat pizza. Oh, you eat one piece and it will carry you two or three days.

When Melinda and I were thinking about moving to Austin or Fort Collins, we made a list of assets and liabilities. Fort Collins: she put “Rocky Mountains.” Austin, Texas: I put “Conan’s Pizza.” It’s just my opinion. I don’t care that much about it. If you said, “Aviator Pizza is an amazing pizza. That’s the best pizza in town,” I’d say, “You know what? It might be. No, it’s not Chicago-style, but that’s a great pizza.”

So, for the purpose of application, when it comes to opinions, do you know what you call someone who has a lot of opinions? Yeah, opinionated. You don’t have to share all of them, or you don’t necessarily need to make them matter that much, because it’s from zero to thirty, by definition.

Beliefs

There’s a second category that I want us to look at. It’s called beliefs. And beliefs are from thirty-one to ninety. The reason is that there are so many types of beliefs. Beliefs are based on reason, research, fact, science—whatever those sorts of things are. And so, the icon for that is a calculator, because your beliefs—you’re supposed to say, Well, it just adds up. It makes a lot of sense to me.



Now in the category of beliefs, you need to understand that there are important beliefs and unimportant beliefs. And there are strong beliefs and weak beliefs. A strong belief is something where you have a lot of facts to support it, and a weak belief is where you don't have many facts, or maybe it's facts that compete with each other, or even contradict each other. But it could be an important or unimportant belief. It could be weak or very strong.

Let me show you. Here's a good example of a very strong belief that's unimportant. I happen to believe that Honda makes the best engine and drivetrain in the world today. Now listen, I have a lot of reasons for believing that: *Road & Track, Car & Driver, Consumer Reports*. Did you know in open real racing in Indianapolis there were six seasons in a row—it's only happened to one automaker—six seasons in a row all thirty-three cars were powered by the Honda drivetrain. And those six seasons of those thirty-three cars—not one was lost from engine failure. Yeah, there's nothing like it.

And Honda has a luxury brand. I like buying used cars and I like buying used cars from luxury people because they don't do their own work. And so, that brand is called Acura. I love Acura. You can buy Acura sometimes cheaper than Hondas. I just bought my sixth Acura this summer—yeah, I love them. I think they're awesome. I love Honda products. I have a Honda mower. I found out Honda's making jet airplanes now and I'm saving for that jet airplane. It's going to take me six lifetimes, but maybe ...

It's a strong belief. It doesn't matter. It's a strong belief, but it's unimportant, right? I mean, I don't care if you drive a Prius if you drive the speed limit and stay out of the left lane. Now I absolutely don't care. [Applause from the congregation.] Those are other people, Prius drivers, telling you to stay out of that lane.

So that's a strong belief that's unimportant, right?

Here's kind of a weak belief that is important, like some of our doctrines here at Grace Covenant Church. The doctrine of end times, for example—that's an important belief, but we don't have a lot of evidence that doesn't have something that contradicts it.

Here's something that's even more important, probably, and it's a little stronger—the doctrine of church government. So, our church government is based on a lot of good reasons. Other churches have a lot of good reasons for their doctrine of leadership. So, it's an important belief, and there's strong, and there's weak.

Here's how it applies. What do you call a person that argues over all of his beliefs? Argumentative. You don't have to be argumentative about everything. Sometimes people get argumentative because they're taking their battle to something that is possibly unimportant. *Like, why do you even care? You're going to die on that hill?* Or, it's not all that strong. *There's a lot of competing evidence for that value, you know. Maybe you shouldn't do that.*

So, for the sake of unity, you should humble yourself and not care about things that are unimportant and possibly you don't know for sure. So, the way we do things around here, we just keep that in mind. We try not to be argumentative. Because certainly one of the signs of maturity is that you would care less and less about more and more, and then care more and more about less and less.

And so why does a person sometimes become argumentative or grasp onto something when they don't have enough facts or truth to hold onto it? A lot of times it's because we make decisions based on emotion and then try to rationalize it with reason. We make decisions based on emotion and then try to justify it with reason. And when you start getting spun up, maybe you should back up a little bit and say, *Maybe I just have an emotional attachment to that and I'm trying to make sense out of it and get you to buy into my view.*

There's another application for the context of belief that's kind of on the other side. It's that you should have enough strong beliefs that you don't waiver from those. In other words, there are some people that have a belief about something, and then a new crowd comes in, and all of a sudden, they give up those beliefs. And sometimes that's often because we want to be liked. Who doesn't want to be liked? Well, sometimes it's okay not to be liked. Sometimes it's okay not to be popular. And if you have a tendency of walking into a situation and having probably a strong belief that is important but you keep acquiescing about that, that would be a place where you could become like Christ in all of life, where you find yourself liked by God, approved by the King, and find yourself not needing to be liked, or not needing that kind of popularity. That's a way that I've seen it happen in my life. What? Why did I blink on that particular value? Here's why. I wanted them to like me. I wanted to be one of the guys. So, you've got to be courageous in your beliefs.

Convictions

We have opinions, one through thirty. We have thirty-one through ninety or so, these beliefs. And then this last section here is convictions. There's not a lot over here. It's ninety-one to a hundred. We want to keep those to a minimum, because convictions are things that you'll die for. You will literally give your life for these. Convictions—you don't hold them; they hold you. They help define who you are and who you're not.

When I think of convictions, I readily go to one of my heroes, a gentleman named Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Bonhoeffer was a pastor in Germany—Nazi Germany. And he had a conviction that it would be better to try to assassinate Adolf Hitler than to allow him to live and continue to kill millions of people. And so, he did. He was part of one of the many conspiracies to try to kill Adolf Hitler. And then he was ultimately caught. But he had a conviction about that. This is why the icon for this conviction is this noose.



Because he chose to put his head through this. He was caught, and just two months before that particular camp was saved by the Allied forces, he was stripped naked. He went to his knees and prayed for his captors and then quietly—he wasn't the victim, he didn't throw tantrums—he said, *I made a decision, I'm living with these consequences*—he put his head through that noose and he hung until he died.

We're supposed to have things that we value that we're willing to put our heads through a noose on. Convictions—they define us. They hold us. We don't hold them. And when we think about convictions around here—"convictions" is a church word. This is a great example of how we use this at our church regularly and purposefully. Because people in church will say things like, "I have a conviction that we should be serving this orphanage in Russia." And we'll say, "Um, okay, maybe, but if you could use a different word, it would be great. A conviction? You'd be willing to die for that?"

"Well, yeah."

"Okay, then we can't really..."

See how we're not arguing the point anymore? We're arguing about the place where that point fits. If it's a strong belief or a weak belief, then we can talk. But we're never going to get to the level of you convincing us that it's a conviction.

"We need to dig wells in Africa."

"Okay, that's a great idea. That's maybe even a weak belief that has consequence. It's weak, but it's purposeful."

"Oh, it's a conviction for me."

"Okay, you know, we're probably not going to...it's not going to work."

And we've had people leave for those kinds of reasons. Not that we didn't love their project, it's just in the wrong category and we could never be as zealous as they are.

How do beliefs find their way into convictions in people's lives? Here's one way that I've found happens over and over again. What starts as an important thing drifts into an ultimate thing. Because I said, convictions define us. And what happens is that something that was important to us became an ultimate thing in our lives and started defining us.

I mean, it's easy to see this from a distance when you look at, for example, an athlete and their whole life is athleticism, especially the professional grade athletes that we watch today. They've been phenomena since they could walk. And they always knew that. And then that injury happens, and then that's it. It was a really wonderful attribute that they had, but they made it their identity, and they've lost their way. They won't retire—that's another sign. They stay healthy, but they won't retire.

Some people do this in their parenting. They make their child's success and prosperity and goodness how they get their identity. *You're such a good mother or father*—that's a good

value. Then that's their identity. *I am known as the good parent.* And so, when little Billy starts acting up, they can lash out and pounce on little Billy, inappropriately so, because there's too much at stake. What's at stake? Their identity. Sometimes they don't retire. The guy's twenty-five—let him go! Let him go!

People needing success in business—maybe they had a little success, or whatever it takes to hold onto it. Success in business is a good thing. I mean, it really is. God made us ambitious. But it becomes a defining thing, and that's when we find ourselves... You read about someone compromising their values; why do they do that? Why did they steal or embezzle or lie, whatever it took? Because it became their identity. They had to stay in that zip code, they had to keep that country club membership. Or they wouldn't retire, they couldn't give it up, because they are that business person.

So, you see, it's so subtle sometimes when it happens. You don't know that it's happening until maybe sometimes it's too late. So, the application here is that these are few and far between. I would suggest that they're all from God and they're all promises from God. And He won't lie or forsake you. Everything else, your identity is in Him and He defines your value, and everything else is a distant way down here belief when it comes to who you are.

Opinions, beliefs, convictions. Here at Grace Covenant Church we are majorly committed to unity. And we do that unity through humility. And when it comes to the various issues, we put them into one of these three categories, and when we have discussions about music, we're going to find it over here in a pizza box. When we talk about the doctrines of Christ himself, it's going to be a conviction, and the doctrine of salvation. You betcha, right here. [Points to the conviction part of the chart.] End times (have I brought that up yet?)—I don't know.

Here's one of our more recent ones. We have this conversation every five years. It still happens in lobbies.

Are you a reformed church?

Well, technically, we loosely hold to what's called progressive dispensationalism, but you know what? If you're reformed, we'd love you to join, get involved, let us love you, learn how to love us. Let's go, let's have some fun.

What about Calvinism?

Oh, yeah, I mean, um-hmm ... on Tuesdays. Sometimes on Saturday, never on Sunday.

Now I know that's not enough for other people who might have it over here, but man, I don't think that's where we are here. But if you are, awesome. Get involved, you can serve here, we can love you, you can love us, no big deal.

Here's where it becomes a big deal. When you take one of these beliefs that you can't really know—it could be a strong belief, it could be an important belief but not strong, and you turn that into a thing and it becomes disunifying in the lobby or in our worship center or in a home group or Sunday school class, then we have a conversation. And you know what? It's not going to be about this. It's going to be about something over here. It's going to be about unity. Because unity is more important than a weak belief. Unity is a strong belief. And only a conviction can pull rank on it.

Okay, that's how we do things here. Growing in maturity is caring more about less, and less about more. And I just want to say this again: it's all good right now. At this very moment, Grace Covenant Church is doing a spectacular job in some very difficult situations, especially with the COVID and the transfer and some people not wanting us to open, some people wanting us to open before there was even COVID, or whatever. So, nobody's getting bad mail. We're all getting along great.

I'm bringing this up to remind you how we do things here at Grace, but also I want to apply it to our times. I want you to see how ... there's a series that we've done together ... how very difficult it is and all that's involved. Because I feel like if I ... if we're able to inform you, it would help you understand how family and government and church are being assaulted in different ways like maybe never before—honestly, literally, in all of history.

Technology Addiction

The first thing I want to bring up is a series that we did a number of years ago called The Sirens' Call. The Sirens' Call was just a two-week series—you can look it up online—and it was based on a class that I took at Regent College on technology and family, if you remember. And basically, it said that digital phones are like digital pacifiers to keep us from ever having a difficult or uncomfortable experience. Any time we're thinking about being bored or being lonely, we go to that pacifier.



Now I would say that if I could summarize two days of lectures and reading into one event, it would be this documentary called *The Social Dilemma*. It's available on Netflix. I would really recommend watching it. Find a friend that still does Netflix and go have a Netflix party and watch this.



Here's why. (And this was based on the class that I was taking as well.) What they do is they just sit down and interview the original engineers of many of the most popular apps that we have: Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, all those. And honestly, it's a confessional. Because these engineers, these men and women, come out and they say, "We made it addictive. We intentionally did things so that you could be stimulated chemically in your brain to always come back and need to come back."

It's an hour and a half, and it kind of pulls the curtain back and shows you—because these men and women are feeling like "I've got to do something about this." It's like in the seventies when we found out that cigarettes were so addictive, not because of the tobacco alone, but they were adding addictive additives to cigarettes. These are those chemists saying, *Okay, I was the guy who invented that addictive chemistry thing, and I'm really sorry what I'm doing here.*

Technology calls us "users." There's only one other profession that does that and that's drug dealers. And these people know that. Their users need another hit. These application engineers say, *We've got to figure this out.* Here's the thing: they take advantage of a human

need, a soul need, and then run with it. Here's a quote: "And they had to admit, they took a human need of connecting with other people and turned it into the very root of addiction, polarization, and radicalization." These are chairs after chairs of Dr. Frankensteins saying, "Okay, I've created this monster and I don't know what to do with it now." These are biochemists that say, "Okay, I invented this, this—I don't know—plague, and I'm sorry." But they tell you what they've done. And the plague that we have called loneliness and our inability to connect with one another is because of these addictive applications that we use regularly. The fear that we have, that epidemic we have that is pervasive like never before, by the way, in one of the more peaceful times in human history, is because they built an application to cause you to want to be afraid.

So why is there division in the context of family and government and church? It's because of these misplaced categories, and also because of these technology addictions.

Assault on Language

But wait, there's more: the assault on language—the importance of language. Words are not just utilitarian. They're not just needed; they're sacred.

There's great story of Helen Keller, if you know her story. When she was nineteen months old she had an illness that caused her to go deaf and blind. And so, she didn't know what things were. And her epiphany moment, her coming to understand reality, came about when the miracle worker, her tutor, showed her that "water" was a word. She was holding her hand in water and then signing in her hand "w-a-t-e-r." And when she identified the word "water" with that wet substance, her world was opened up.

That's the power of language. And right now, we abuse it. Words define our reality, the depth of our reality. Words define what is true and right and real. If you want to ruin a culture—every dictator and propagandist knows this—you steal the language first. That's why Orwell's *1984* has "Newspeak." They changed the meanings of words.

In the context of restoration of a culture, Confucius realized the culture was in disarray and he said, "The first thing we do, the essential thing we do, is the restoration of word and language." And that revival lasted 1,200 years.

How about you? Are you a little tired of being called words that don't reflect who you are and what you value? The inciting of riots now is because of a violation of the sacred nature of words.

Why is there so much disharmony in families and government and church? Here's why. Because of misplaced categories, because of addiction to technology, plus the abuse of vocabulary.

The Press / Media

Wait, there's more: the press and the media. Listen carefully to this, okay? The media—all the venues—consciously made a decision to monetize their information in the exact same way that the application developers did it. Do you understand what I just said? They couldn't make money by selling papers or regular commercials anymore because people weren't watching TVs or buying newspapers any more. So, the way they pay their bills now is they go to the same engineers who made those applications addictive and say, "How do we get those people addicted to come to our news station?" It's not about telling you the whole truth any more. It's one side of a truth, so that—and the addiction is ingenious—sinister and ingenious—but it's the addiction to fear and anger. And so, they only want to tell you the side of the story that you want to hear so that it will make you afraid or make you angry so that you'll keep coming back for more. And they're doing this just for the money. There are journalists and then there's this other thing. There are very few journalists.

If you watch Sean Hannity or Rachel Maddow, watch how—this much is trying to inform you, but this much is trying to direct you towards anger or fear, so that ... *See you tomorrow night, same time. Don't miss it. You might run out of that fear or anger, so I'm here to help.*

Fake news is this: it's only telling one side of a story so that they can get you to come back. Here's one of the things they found out. Fake news travels six times faster, is shared six times faster than real news, the whole story. And so, news agencies, for monetary gain, will send out a fake news thing and let it go for two hours or two days, and then do a retraction later and say, *Oh yeah, you know what, on the other side of this story, it's this.* It doesn't matter to them because they already made their money off of you clicking it and sending it to your friends. And you know what? They got you going. They got you afraid and angry. And they made their money, and all that it costs? Truth. All that it costs was truth.

If you find yourself with a lot of stuff going on inside of you right now, and it's fear or anger, it's in the engineering application technology business that's called a rabbit hole. You are down a rabbit hole and they own you. And you're being played.

Look what we have against us now. We have category misuse, we have technology addiction, we have the violation of language, and now we have the media being involved in that. No wonder these sacred things that are given by God are tearing us apart.

Wait, there's more. Hold on, let me go on. Homework: if you just go ten days, just ten days, without watching any kind of news, just see what happens. I mean, you don't have much to lose except anger or fear.

There's a great book called *Indistractable*. I'd recommend that too. It teaches you how to un-program yourself.

Spiritual War: Confusion and Deception Used to Create Division

Wait, there's more. I did a series last year, 2019, called *Perspective*. And this was the theme: we are in a spiritual war. There are unseen forces, good and evil, and they have the will of God and the will of Satan himself. And the will of Satan is this: he just wants to break stuff. And he uses confusion and deception for division. Let me say that again. The evil part of the spirit world works this way. It's confusion and deception for division.



Now let me read you a quote from that Netflix series. Here's a quote from one of the leaders in this field. "The very meaning of our culture is now manipulation. We have put deceit as the absolute center of all things." *We have put deceit as the absolute center of all things.* That is the king of spades in the hand of the devil.

You want to know why we have trouble with categories? Do you want to know why we have trouble with language? You want to know why we have trouble with these other things that we're competing with and the media doesn't want to give up on this? Because there's a satanic war going on, a spiritual war. And deception and deceit are causing division. We're getting wrecked here.

Frailty of Friendships

We're fighting a war on five fronts. Here's our formula at this point: misplaced categories, technology addiction, abuse of language, the media, and now spiritual war. And let me just say this. Fighting a war on five fronts—this is another truth. It has to do with the frailty of friendships. Have you noticed how you can just miss a meal and all of a sudden all of the things you don't like so much but that you've ignored about your best friend, you are now gravitating towards those. All you need is a Snickers bar and you could be friends again, right? And that has to do with the frailty of friendship. And what it takes years to build and love, it

takes a moment to destroy and burn to the ground because of some tweet or text or whatever. And then it's all over. And all you're thinking about is all the things that bugged you about that person that you've spent twenty, thirty, forty, fifty years loving, and they lived under your roof, and you gave it all up for what? For what?

That's why Peter says in a church that's being persecuted, the world's coming down all around him, and he says this: "Most of all, love one another, deeply. Because love covers a multitude of sin." Listen to that—"... because love covers a multitude of sin." Take the love away and all you see is a multitude of sin. What does it take to take love away? Well, we've worked the formula here. Put something in the wrong category. Use some violent vocabulary, accusing them of something that's not true. Join the social media addiction, and mix it all together.

Cost Benefit Analysis

- **For what return?! A GIF or MEME that is not a strong belief**
- **That is abuse of language**
- **The media is MONETIZED**
- **Plus, the spiritual war to divide us**

Look at the cost benefit analysis of any one of these choices that we have today. What difference is it going to make if you send something or do something or say something? How many of you right now know exactly who you're going to vote for in the presidential election? Let me just see your hands. [Many hands go up.] I don't care who you vote for. All right. So, let's just say almost everyone here. So, you put something out there, you're not going to convince anyone. You're not going to move anyone over on your argument. But it could cost the division of the family, the government, the church. It could cost you your job.

Me? Join me, I'm voting for John Wick. I mean, we need somebody to clean this place up. John Wick and Jason Bourne, vice president. Let's go. They'll be done by noon. It won't take long. I hope I'm still standing.

Application

How do we get back to where we were meant to be? How do we get back to this: family, government, church? Here's how. We start with the church. We start with this church and we

say, *Look, let's start with convictions of what we believe and then just give love towards each other in humility so that we might bring about an untold expression of unity.* And then we would shine like the stars in the contrast to the decadent culture that we're living around. Let's give each other a lot of grace. Let's just be fun again, you know, and show people what fun looks like.

Philippians 3:7

But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ.

Here's how Paul does this. I love Paul's conviction for life. In the same book, Philippians chapter 3: "Whatever were gains to me in the past"—*how I identified myself, all those famous things that I did*—"I now consider loss for the sake of Christ."

Philippians 3:10-11

I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of His resurrection and participation in His sufferings, becoming like Him in His death,¹¹ and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead.

I just want to know Christ," *that's it.* "I want to know the power of His resurrection and the participation in all of His sufferings." *You know that last time I got beat up really bad, I got ninety lashes or something total, and I was thinking, I wonder if this is how Jesus felt. Wow, I feel like Jesus might have felt.* That's how he interprets his beatings. *I want to share in His sufferings.*

He goes on. I want to become like Him in His death. *I hope they crucify me. And somehow, attaining to the resurrection that's from the dead.* Let's be that church. Oh, my goodness, let's be that church, guys.

Philippians 3:14

I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

Look what he says in verse 14: “I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward, that is in Christ Jesus.” We make that our conviction, to become like Christ in all of life, and everything else is just going to find its way.

Let me remind you—Grace, we’re doing a beautiful job of expressing this. Let’s get outside the campus and continue to do this. Let’s start using words like opinion, belief, and conviction in conversations around the house, around the office, around the neighborhood. Let’s find very few hills to die on and most of the other hills to enjoy. Let’s not be played any more.

I hope today you had your eyes opened to how complicated and sophisticated the attacks on us are. We are being attacked biologically, psychologically, and spiritually. But greater is He that is within me than he that is in the world. There’s my hope. It’s in a promise. God gave it to me. He gave it to you too. Let’s live like that, okay?

Let me pray.

God, thank you, Lord, for stopping us and reminding us what matters, what is true and right and real; that we just want to know Christ and the power of His resurrection; that we maybe would participate in His sufferings—not undue sufferings because we’re opinionated or argumentative. But that we would hold strong to the things that are true, that are promised by You.

Lord, we’d ask that we would become like You even in our death, that we’d have convictions that we’d die for. And somehow that we would attend that resurrection from the dead that’s a mystery to us, but a promise from You. And so, God, I ask that You would cause us to press on towards that goal, to win that prize, which You have called us to—to spend eternity with You, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Lord, would You give our souls the courage to take responsibility for maybe something we’ve said or done; that we would openly be generous with forgiveness? Lord, I’d ask that You would give us the power of the resurrection in our everyday lives; that maybe if we’ve involved

ourselves, become victims because maybe of ignorance of these various thing, I'd ask that You help us and free us from that.

Lord, I'd ask that we would be true and right and real in not just what we think, but in what we say and do. Let us be famous for our love and our grace, but also our courage. We pray this in Jesus' holy name. Amen.

Well, I hope that was good. It was good for me. [Applause] I love this church. I hope you love this church. I love this church. There's so much power and so much love. So, we'll see you again. If you'll let the ushers dismiss you, that's strategic, and if you keep your mask on until you get outside, that would be great too. Thank you.