

Series: *What Does It Mean to be a Scripture-Driven Church?*

Title: "Seven Marks of a Scripture-Driven Church" (part 3)

Speaker: Rev. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 3/29/2009

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The third mark of a Scripture-driven church is this: The people and leaders of a Scripture-driven church rightly handle the Word of God. They rightly handle the Word of God.

2nd Timothy chapter 2, verse 15 – “Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the Word of truth.” You know, I think this may be one of the most understood and misrepresented verses in the Bible. And that has to do with this term, “rightly dividing.” The word that’s translated “rightly dividing” in that verse is the Greek word *orthotomeo*. In the Greek of New Testament times, *orthotomeo* was an engineering term. It was used in road building. It was a term that meant cutting a road on a straight path, so that travelers will be able to arrive at their destination directly, without deviation. It was also a mining term: The idea was to drill a straight mine shaft, so that the miners could get directly to the “mother lode.” *Orthotomeo*.

What is Paul, by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, saying when he applies this term to the Word of God? What does he mean when he says, “rightly dividing the Word of truth?” He means this: As you teach and preach the Word, take your hearers straight to the truth. Handle God’s Word properly. Teach Scripture accurately. Don’t deviate from the Word of truth. Don’t be turned

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aside to anything else. That is what the people and leaders of a Scripture-driven church do: They rightly handle the Word of God.

They know what the Bible says. They don't merely revere the Bible, they read it and study it as though their lives depended upon it – and they do! In John chapter 6, verse 63, Jesus said, "The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life." And in response, just a few verses later, Peter says this: "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life." And Jesus also makes the point negatively, in John chapter 14, verse 24: "He who does not love Me does not keep my words; and the word which you hear is not Mine but the Father's who sent Me."

The people and leaders of a Scripture-driven church handle the Word of God carefully. The Scripture-driven church teaches Scripture accurately. The Scripture-driven church operates under the principle that Scripture interprets Scripture, as we saw in 2 Corinthians chapter two. The bright idea of the moment, the latest religious fad – these things do not interpret the Word of God.

One man's opinion – or one woman's opinion – does not interpret the Word of God. That is how cults have gotten started in the past. And that is how new

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cults have started in our day. There's one particular cult that you'll find on the radio right now. This cult has its own radio network. The leader of this cult says that the church age is over. He says that Satan, not Christ, now rules the church. Several years ago he wrote a book that said that Christ would return in 1994. He was wrong. But now he's written a book that says that Christ will return in the year 2011. And people are following after him, even though he has proven himself to be a false prophet.

And dear friends, more to the point, this cult also denies the Gospel: It says that believing on Christ for salvation is a work of the flesh, so you can only beg God to save you and hope that perhaps He will, and you can have no real assurance of salvation. And all of it stems from one man's wrong handling of the Word of God. This, dear friends, is a cult. They play some good Christian music on their radio network. And many people are drawn in by that. But in between the good music is the poison of false teaching. This organization denies the true Christ, and it denies the true Gospel.

No – the people and leaders of a Scripture-driven church don't follow the latest fad, the latest bright idea, or the latest pronouncement of some strong personality. They rightly handle the Word of God. That's the third mark of a Scripture-driven church.

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The fourth mark of a Scripture-driven church is this: The people and leaders of a Scripture-driven church operate under the Bible's authority. In other words, they put their commitment into practice. They understand the practical, fourfold use of Scripture that we find in 2 Timothy 3:16 – that all Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable, first of all, for doctrine – teaching us the right path; secondly, for reproof – telling us when we've gotten off the right path; thirdly, for correction – getting the church back on the right path; and fourthly, for instruction in righteousness – keeping the church on the right path.

In everything the church is, and says, and does, the thing that is first and foremost in their minds is this question: Is it Biblical? Is it Biblical? Dear friends, if it's not Biblical, it is wrong. If it's not Biblical, God is against it. If it's not Biblical, it has no place in the church. And if your church is doing what is not Biblical, God by His very nature is against what your church is doing, because He will not, He cannot, deny His own Word.

Let me give two practical examples:

Example number one: Is your church's worship God-centered or man-centered? I'm going to bring in a verse here that you might think doesn't apply.

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But we'll see that it does. Ephesians chapter 5 verse 18: "Do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit." "Do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit." The context of that verse is a discussion of the fact that Christians need to conduct our lives carefully. And in the very next verse, Ephesians chapter 5 and verse 19, Paul is talking about worship – "speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord."

In that context, in the context of a careful Christian walk, in the context of proper Christian worship, Paul says this: "Be not drunk with wine, in which is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit." And the idea of the word "dissipation" in the original is the idea of loss of self-control. The underlying principle is this: Don't come under the influence of anything that would cause you to lose your God-given self-control. Don't come under the influence of anything that would cause you to do or say things, in the church, that are contrary to the mind of the Spirit of God as revealed in His Word.

Let's put that principle in the context of the contemporary church. The contemporary evangelical church often equates drummed-up emotion with the moving of the Spirit of God. And so the goal of much of contemporary worship is to get people on an emotional high.

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Now don't get me wrong. I am not against emotion in church. I think a preacher whose heart is on fire with the Word of God will preach with fire. And I think that as we sing the great hymns of the faith, there is a proper emotional response. Dear friends, I submit that if you are truly a believer, if the Spirit of God is truly living in you, you cannot sing something like Wesley's great hymn, *And Can It Be, That I Should an Interest in the Savior's Blood*, without the Spirit of God stirring your soul. How can you sing that refrain, "Amazing love! How can it be, that Thou, my God, should'st die for me?" – how can you sing that without being moved by the realization of the great, great grace and love of God for you, a hopeless sinner, and all that is yours in Christ?

But that's not the kind of emotion I'm talking about. That's not the kind of emotion you see in most contemporary evangelical church services. What you see is manufactured emotion. Worked-up emotion. Everything is geared toward getting people to let down their guard emotionally – getting people drunk with emotion. The loud, worldly music; the driving beat; the same lyrics repeated over and over again; the so-called worship leaders performing up front; the lights; the visuals; all these things are geared toward working up emotion. And with that working up of emotion comes loss of control – the kind of loss of control that Paul warns against in Ephesians chapter 5.

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Dear friends, this kind of drummed-up emotion is not the work of the Spirit of God. It is contrary to the Spirit of God. Go to one of these services, or watch one on television or on the Internet, and you'll often see exactly what I'm talking about. In a moment of drummed-up emotion, in a moment of loss of God-given restraint, a "worship leader" up in front will say something about God, or about Jesus, or about worship, or about the Christian life – he'll say something that is completely un-Biblical. But in the ecstasy of the moment, in that moment of un-restraint, a thousand people in the congregation will shout "Amen," and be led astray, swept away, from the truth. And isn't this exactly what Paul warned against in a another passage we considered earlier in this series, in 2nd Corinthians chapter 11 and verse 4? Paul said, I'm concerned that you're going to put with another Jesus, another gospel, another spirit.

Dear friends, worship is not a performance. Genuine worship is not the product of drummed-up emotion. Biblical worship is not the loss of God-given restraint and self-control. Genuine, Biblical worship is not man-centered. It is God-centered. It is reverent. We are not adoring a rock star. We are worshipping the living and holy God. We are worshipping the consuming fire. We are worshipping the King of glory. We are worshipping the crucified, risen, and glorified Savior.

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Let me give a second example. Is the material you're using in your Sunday school classes, in your vacation Bible school, in your youth meetings – is it true to the Word of God? Does it stay on track, or does it get off-track? Does it present the one true Gospel in its fullness, or does it water down the Gospel? Does it teach salvation by grace through faith alone, or does it subtly mingle in works? Does it teach right living in obedience to God's Word, or does it bring in agendas such as humanistic environmentalism, or notions of political correctness that are contrary to God's Word? Is the focus on pleasing God out of grateful obedience because of all that Christ has done for us, out of a desire to lay up treasures in Heaven, or is the focus on pleasing God so that we can supposedly lay up treasures on earth, so that we can build material prosperity and the trappings of success in the here and now? There are Sunday school and Bible school and youth group materials these days that lead both young people and adults into these kinds of errors.

The people and leaders of a Scripture-driven church are on their guard against these things. They are on their guard against false worship. They are on their guard against false teaching. They are on their guard against un-Biblical practices. They operate under the Bible's authority. They put their commitment into practice by always asking the question, "Is it Biblical?" That's the fourth

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mark of a Scripture-driven church. Also, they aren't afraid to root out the things in the church that aren't Biblical – the things that by definition displease God.

And that brings us to the fifth mark of a Scripture-driven church: The people and leaders of a Scripture-driven church identify and reject illegitimate authorities. They identify and reject illegitimate authorities. In 2nd Corinthians 10 verse 4 and 5 we read these words: "For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal" – they do not originate in the flesh – "but [they are] mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ."

Often we think about these words in the context of apologetics. We think about giving an answer to the world for the hope that is within us. And we're going to get to that. But we need to remember that Paul's words to the church at Corinth are not just about our answer to illegitimate authorities out in the world. He is talking, first of all, about dealing with illegitimate authorities in the context of the local church. He's talking about things that happen within the church – illegitimate authorities that can take over in the local church. That was the problem of the church at Corinth.

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He's saying this: In the church, it's not enough to submit to the right authority. You also have to reject wrong authorities. The two go hand in hand. Submission to the right authority, submission to legitimate authority, logically demands the rejection of illegitimate authorities. This is where the rubber really meets the road in the local church, because it often means confronting people about their loyalty to an illegitimate authority. And usually, that's not easy. That can be one of the most difficult things that the people and leadership of a church have to do. But dear friends, it is one of the most vital things a church can ever do.

And when we do it, it needs to be on the Bible's authority, not our authority. And we need to do it, no matter who is involved. In Galatians chapter 2, verses 11 through 21, we read that Paul confronted the Apostle Peter himself. Peter himself was getting off the track. Peter himself was submitting to an illegitimate authority. And he had done it publicly. And it was going to harm the church. And Paul confronted Peter publicly, in front of the believers at Antioch, and he said to Peter, you're not being straightforward about the truth of the Gospel. You're acting in a way that is contrary to the truth of God, which says that we are not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Christ. And you're doing what you're doing, because you're afraid of certain strong personalities who

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have come among us here, and these people have the Gospel wrong themselves. Peter, you are submitting to an illegitimate authority, and in doing so, you are playing the hypocrite. And worse than that, you are denying the truth of the Gospel.

There are many sources of illegitimate authority. The source of illegitimate authority may be a book somebody has read that mingles human philosophy with the Bible. It may be something that some other church is doing that appears to be successful, something that draws numbers, or brings in money, or something that gains the unbelieving world's approval – but something that is contrary to the Word of God. It may be the ideas and influences of some dominating personality within the church who is not operating under the authority of the Word.

These days, churches are often afraid to confront illegitimate authority – especially when that authority is some prominent person, or some learned scholar, or a strong personality. But we must do it. Lovingly, firmly, but we must do it. We must remember that souls are at stake. We must remember that the Word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ are at stake. We must remember that on vital issues we are not dealing with matters of opinion. We are dealing with issues of God's truth versus man's error. Beware, Jesus said, of

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falling into the subtle trap of teaching as doctrines the commandments of men. It can happen so easily. Any authority that is not Biblical authority is illegitimate authority, and it must be rejected if a church is to be a Scripture-driven church. That's the fifth mark of a Scripture-driven church.