

# CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	9
<b>PART 1: The Anatomy of a Church</b>	
1. The Skeletal Structure	17
2. The Internal Systems	29
3. The Muscles	59
4. The Head	75
<b>PART 2: The Dynamic Church</b>	
5. The Pattern of the Early Church	85
6. Elders, Deacons, and Other Church Members	93
7. A Look at the Thessalonian Model	103
8. Marks of an Effective Church	113
9. The Calling of the Church	131
10. The Lord's Work in the Lord's Way	141
<b>PART 3: Qualities of an Excellent Servant</b>	
11. Understanding the Seducing Spirit	157
12. Understanding the Duties of the Ministry	167
13. Shepherding the Flock of God	191
<b>APPENDIXES</b>	
<b>1. Answering the Key Questions about Elders</b>	203
What Is the Proper Understanding of the Term <i>Elder</i> ?	204
How Is the Term Elder Used in Reference to the Church?	206
What Is the Relationship of the Elder to the Bishop and the Pastor?	208
What Is the Role of an Elder?	210
What Are the Qualifications of an Elder?	212
Can Women Serve as Elders?	215
How Are We to Ordain Elders?	215
Should the Church Support Elders Financially?	219
Is the Pastorate a Team Effort?	221
Does Government by Elders Eliminate the Role of a Special Leader?	222
What Is the Elder's Relationship to the Congregation?	224

<b>2. Answering the Key Questions about Deacons</b>	227
How Does the New Testament Use the Word <i>Deacon</i> ?	228
What Kind of Service Does the Greek Word for “Deacon” Imply?	228
Does the New Testament Speak about the Office of a Deacon?	230
Does the New Testament Specify Any Individual as a Deacon?	231
Doesn’t Acts 6 Talk about Deacons?	233
If the Men in Acts 6:5 Weren’t Deacons, Who Were They?	235
Is There Any Scripture Passage That Refers to Deacons in the Official Sense?	237
What Qualifies a Man to Be a Deacon?	238
What Does the Bible Say about Deaconesses?	239
What Is the Difference between Elders and Deacons?	240
<b>3. Qualifications for Spiritual Leadership</b>	243
“Above Reproach”—He Is a Man of Unquestionable Character	244
“The Husband of One Wife”—He Is Sexually Pure	247
“Temperate”—He Is Not Given to Excess	249
“Prudent”—He Is Self-Disciplined	251
“Respectable”—He Is Well Organized	252
“Hospitable”—He Loves Strangers	252
“Able to Teach”—He Is Skilled in Teaching	253
“Not Addicted to Wine”—He Is Not a Drinker	254
“Not . . . Pugnacious”—He Is Not a Fighter	255
“Gentle”—He Easily Pardons Human Failure	255
“Peaceable”—He Is Not Quarrelsome	255
“Free from the Love of Money”—He Is Not Covetous	256
“One Who Manages His Own Household Well”—He Maintains a Godly Family	257
“Not a New Convert”—He Is a Mature Christian	259
“A Good Reputation with Those Outside the Church” —He Is Well Respected by Non-Christians	262
<b>4. Elements of Church Discipline</b>	265
The Place of Discipline	266
The Purpose of Discipline	267
The Person of Discipline	269
The Provocation of Discipline	269
The Process of Discipline	270
The Power of Discipline	277

<b>5. Restoring a Sinning Brother or Sister</b>	281
Pick Up the Believer	281
Hold Up the Believer	283
Build Them Up	286
<b>6. Should Fallen Leaders Be Restored?</b>	287
<b>7. The Danger of False Teaching</b>	291
Reminding True Leaders	292
Avoiding False Teaching	293
<b>8. Why I Still Preach the Bible</b>	301
A Visit with Dr. Feinberg	302
Trying to Be Relevant	303
The Challenge and Call to Preach the Word	304
Ten Reasons to Preach the Word of God	306
<b>9. Why Personal Integrity Is Crucial for the Church</b>	319
<b>10. Why I Love the Church</b>	325
The Lord Himself Is Building the Church	326
The Church Is the Outworking of an Eternal Plan	328
The Church Is the Most Precious Reality on Earth	333
The Church Is an Earthly Expression of Heaven	334
<b>11. Why Doctrine Is Practical</b>	337
Building on the Truth	338
Living by the Truth	339
Departing from the Truth	339
Hearing the Truth	340
<b>INDEXES</b>	
Scripture Index	343
Subject Index	353

# 1. THE SKELETAL STRUCTURE



When I go on a trip to preach in other places, I use my time to talk with people, pray to the Lord, and read books. During those times I also find that I am able to put aside the pressures of my regular ministry and think clearly. That is often when the Lord impresses upon my heart certain important things He wants me to understand and share with the people I minister to. During one trip, the Lord placed a concern in my heart for Grace Community Church. That church in southern California is the heart and soul of my life. Although I've been there for nearly forty years, I still feel like the ministry there has just begun. I anticipate an exciting future before the church, which will be filled with joy, expectation, and potential. But like any church, from time to time we face crises. How we handle those crises determines the strength of our ministry.

When Grace Church was experiencing tremendous growth in the 1970s, there were so many things happening that I couldn't keep up with them. It was an exciting, euphoric time for the church. I like to call that



time the years of discovery. When I came to Grace Church, I didn't know much. Every week, I'd study and prepare my sermons, and on Sundays the congregation would learn together with me. I'd share what the Bible said, and people would say, "Wow! So that's what the Bible is saying!" We were taking big steps in terms of our spiritual growth and understanding, and the Lord added many people to the church. Those years were like a prolonged honeymoon. There was enthusiasm and energy everywhere.

When I first arrived at the church, my modest goal was to keep the people already there from leaving. I never envisioned that the church would grow to the size it is now. That's why the verse I have come to understand the most during my years of ministry is Ephesians 3:20, which speaks of God as "Him who is able to do exceeding abundantly beyond all that we ask or think." Throughout my ministry I've seen God do far beyond anything I could ever have imagined!

Churches all seem to follow the same pattern of growth and decline. The first generation fights to discover and establish the truth. Grace Church went through that; the early years were a time of discovery and establishing the truth. The second generation fights to maintain the truth and proclaim it. We have seen that as well. Many of the things we've learned have appeared in my published books, and we have distributed millions of cassette tapes and in recent years, CDs. (Most recently we have utilized satellite technology to televise Sunday messages and beam teaching lectures to overseas locations. The ministry has also taken advantage of the World Wide Web to make MP3 and podcast messages available to many outside our church.) We have trained men to become pastors, go out, and start teaching other people. We have shared what we know with other pastors.

Yet often members of the church's third generation couldn't care less about that. Why? Since they weren't a part of the fight the first two generations faced, they don't have anything at stake. They tend to take for granted the things others have worked and fought hard to establish.

That scares me. The toughest thing to deal with in the ministry is indifference. It's heartbreaking to know that those who weren't a part of the building of a church tend to take everything for granted. Because they weren't a part of the battle, they didn't pay the price and enjoy the sweet taste of victory. They don't know what the battle was like. A

## THE SKELETAL STRUCTURE



person has only one life to live, and I look at what God has given me as the greatest possible use of my life: being a part of building Grace Community Church. Those who weren't a part of the process of fighting, discovering, and establishing the truth are often unable to appreciate what God has done.

Many of the people now at our church don't understand the sacrifice of time, talent, effort, and money that other people made to establish and grow the church. Early in our church's history, a young couple forfeited their honeymoon because they wanted to give to the church. That is just one of many illustrations of sacrifice I could give. The newer people, on the other hand, can spend too much of their time fooling around with trivial things and becoming picky about them when they should be more concerned about God's kingdom.

The child of apathy is criticism. It is easy for a person to take everything for granted and begin criticizing any imperfections he finds. Author Thomas Hardy (1840–1928) said he had a friend who could go into any beautiful meadow and immediately find a manure pile. A person shouldn't have that kind of perspective.

God has given Grace Church many wonderful people, and we thank Him for that. But I know there are also people who come to church only when it's convenient. For them, going to church is low on the priority list. If they can't afford to go anywhere else for a weekend, they come to church. They don't see any need for commitment. Some people don't come on Sunday nights. They think one sermon a week is enough. They should be given two hundred sermons in one week to shake them out of their complacency! Danish philosopher and theologian Soren Kierkegaard (1813–1855) observed that people think the preacher is an actor and they are to be his critics. What they don't realize is that they're the actors and he's the prompter offstage reminding them of their lost lines.<sup>1</sup>

It's easy for people—even Christians—to begin expecting that everything will be done for them. They show up for church only if they think they will get something out of it.

Building a church is easy. The hard work begins after the church has grown, when you're faced with people who tend to become complacent.

I once received a letter from a young pastor thinking about leaving the ministry, and it broke my heart. This is what he wrote:

## THE MASTER'S PLAN FOR THE CHURCH



Let me explain to you something I'm concerned about that I have not been able to correct and is causing me to consider leaving the ministry. Perhaps the Lord will use your insights to give me some light.

I firmly believe that the leadership of a church should be the very best, not only in their personal spiritual lives but also in being an example for people they lead. I am not saying that a leader has to be perfect or superhuman, but he should have a living, growing personal relationship with our Lord. I firmly believe that if the leaders of a church don't present a lifestyle of commitment and dedication to their Lord and church, their followers won't either.

The problem, Pastor MacArthur, is that two-thirds of our elected officers attend only one service a week. I'm not saying they all have to be present every time the doors are open, but I do believe that excepting unforeseen situations, illnesses, and vacations, the leadership of a church should make a double effort to be present at the services, if for no other reason than for the encouragement of the saints and the pastor. I find it extremely difficult to believe that proper leadership can be provided when the leaders do not spend enough time with their people to find out what their hurts and fears are. At our board meetings, I find that by far the majority of the time is spent on items that have no direct relationship to the needs and hurts of people. I believe that because of that, our church has come to a stalemate, which is equal to going backward instead of moving ahead. I have brought those things to the attention of our board on several occasions (even some of the people on our board are not faithful in their attendance), with absolutely no results.

I am not talking about men and women who simply are not able to make it to church but people who just will not come. Some of the leaders say they are too busy, too tired at the end of the day, or don't even offer an excuse. But those leaders are not afraid to remind me that they are the power of the church. That happens often. I have come to the place where if this continues on into next year, I am ready to resign the pastorate. How is it possible for a pastor to direct his flock, establish the needed programs, and develop spiritual leadership if he can't get other leaders to back him? I'm open to your advice. I believe our church has great possibilities. But as long as we are lukewarm, the Lord will not bless us or use us.

## THE SKELETAL STRUCTURE



Thousands of different pastors could have written that letter, because it is common for people to take for granted the good things God has given them. I don't want that to happen at Grace Church. I don't want our people to forget the Lord but to continue to fear His name.

Writing to his readers, the apostle Peter said, "I will always be ready to remind you of these things, even though you already know them, and have been established in the truth which is present with you" (2 Peter 1:12). Peter had a high calling from God, and he didn't want to be irresponsible about how he handled it. He didn't want to be negligent to those he was called to teach, so he continually reminded the people of what they had already learned. He was saying, "I know that you already know these things, but you need to be reminded about them." Peter then adds, "I consider it right, as long as I am in this earthly dwelling, to stir you up by way of reminder, knowing that the laying aside of my earthly dwelling is imminent. . . . and I will also be diligent that at any time after my departure you will be able to call these things to mind" (vv. 13–15). There is virtue in repeating not-to-be-forgotten basics. That is what I would like to do now.

### A STUDY IN CHURCH ANATOMY

Many pastors visit Grace Church to find out why it prospers and what we are doing right. They desire to know what God is doing, and some of them think they can pick up methods, tools, programs, and ideas and apply them to their own churches. However, that is like going to buy a steer and coming back home with just the hide. They're seeing only the flesh of our ministries, not the internal aspects that make those ministries work properly. Beneath the surface of things is a foundation that people don't know about. We try to tell pastors that they may see a ministry functioning at our church, but it is what occurs behind the scenes that they need to understand.

For this first part of our study about church leadership, I am going to use the analogy the apostle Paul uses in 1 Corinthians 12:12–31. The church is a body, and we want to look closely at its anatomy. Every body has certain features: a skeleton, internal systems, muscles, and flesh. A church needs to have a framework (a skeleton), internal systems (certain attitudes), muscles (different functions), and flesh (the form of the programs). Remove any one of those key features, and the





body cannot survive. Anatomy is the study of how the components fit and function together. Let's look at the anatomy of a church.

We start with the skeleton. For any body to function, it has to have some structure. The skeleton in vertebrate animals is what gives them their structure. Likewise, there are certain skeletal truths that a church has to be committed to if it is to have a sound structure. These are unalterable, nonnegotiable doctrines that it cannot compromise in any way. Yield on any of these crucial points and you destroy the skeleton—the church ceases to be a church.

### A HIGH VIEW OF GOD

A church absolutely must emphasize knowing and glorifying God. I fear that the church in America has descended from that emphasis and focused instead on humanity. The contemporary church thinks its goal is to help people *feel better* about themselves. It offers them nothing more than spiritual placebos. It focuses on psychology, self-esteem, entertainment, and a myriad of other diversions to try to meet the attendees' felt needs.

However, if you know and glorify God, you have satisfied the greatest needs of your life. "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom" (Prov. 9:10). When you have a right relationship with God, everything else will fall into its proper place. I am not saying that we are to ignore people's needs. We are to be concerned about people the same way God is. But we must strike a balance, and that begins with a high view of God that takes Him seriously.

I feel a righteous indignation toward preachers and others who want to take God off His throne and turn Him into a servant who has to meet their every demand. People are irreverent; they do not know how to worship God. Some think worship is anything that induces a warm feeling.

So many church members know little about God. There are too many Marthas and not enough Marys (see Luke 10:38–42). We are so busy serving all the time that we don't take the time to sit at Jesus' feet. We don't tremble at God's Word. We don't allow ourselves to be confronted by God's holiness and our own sinfulness so He can sanctify us and make us usable for His glory.

When a person dies, we have a tendency to say, "How could God let that happen?" We have no right to ask that. We should ask, "What



are *we* doing alive?” God, being holy, could have destroyed Adam and Eve (and hence all mankind) when they first fell into sin. Just because God is gracious toward us is no excuse for us to be indifferent. God must be taken seriously.

Look in your local Christian bookstore. You could take most of the books there, throw them into the sea, and not lose anything valuable. The vast majority of them are just placebos that superficially attack trivial problems. During the eras when the church was most holy, Christians had very few books to read, but the ones they did have told them how to have a relationship with God. Most books today don’t do that.

A survey taken at a nationwide pastors’ conference revealed that most pastors feel they need more help in dealing with families. I’m amazed at that. With all the books available on family-related issues, that’s *still* an area in which Christian leaders perceive a lack of resources?! The answer isn’t to write more materials about the family; the problem is that people aren’t taking God seriously and walking according to His laws. If families were taught a high view of God, there would not be as many family problems in the church.

James 4:8 tells sinners, “Draw near to God and He will draw near to you.” If they repent and draw close to God, He will come close to them. But many say, “When I get near God, it is easy to become nervous.” That’s why James 4:8 also says, “Cleanse your hands, you sinners.” The closer people get to God, the more they see their own sins. Consequently, they must humble themselves before the Lord and mourn over sin. James 4:10 says that when that happens, “He will exalt you.”

We must take God seriously and exalt Him; we don’t want to have a man-centered church. We are to reach out to people in the love of Christ, but God is still to be the focus of our life and worship.

### THE ABSOLUTE AUTHORITY OF SCRIPTURE

A second nonnegotiable truth that makes up the skeleton of the church’s structure is the absolute authority of Scripture. The Bible is constantly under attack, even from within the professing church. Not so long ago I read an article by a seminary professor who argued that Christians should not view homosexual behavior as sinful. If a person wants to advocate that view, all he has to do is disregard the Bible. It is inconsistent for a seminary professor to deny the Bible when he is training men to minister the Word of God. But such denial is happening more



and more today—teachers and preachers attack the Bible head-on.

I believe the charismatics attack the Bible when they add all their visions and revelations to it. It is a subtle and often unintentional attack, but it is an attack just the same. They say that Jesus told them this, and that God told them that. In the meantime, they are undermining the Bible because they no longer see it as the single authority.

Those who believe God speaks regularly with special little messages for individual Christians trivialize His Word. However, God reveals Himself primarily through the pages of Scripture, and Christians must uphold that written revelation as the absolute, sole authority.

One of the worst assaults on God's Word comes from people who say they believe the Bible yet don't know what it teaches. That is the subtlest kind of attack there is. There are people all across America who *say* they believe the Bible from cover to cover but don't *know* one paragraph of it. How can they believe what they don't know?

Jesus said, "Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God" (Matt. 4:4). If every word that comes out of the mouth of God feeds us, we ought to study every word. Today, preaching has lost that.

A pastor in another state once told me, "I pastor a church for only two years, and then I leave."

"Have you been doing that for a long time?" I asked

"Yes," he replied. "I spent two years here, two years there, and two years in another place." I asked why.

"I have fifty-two sermons. I preach each one twice, and then I leave."

I pressed him. "Why don't you teach the whole counsel of God?"

"I don't teach all of it," he conceded. "I just teach the parts that I think are important."

But every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God is important!

## SOUND DOCTRINE

The third thing a church must have as a part of its skeleton is sound doctrine. If you have a high view of God and are committed to Him, you must follow what His Word teaches, and sound doctrine fills that Word.



Many Christians today are vague about doctrine. Pastors offer “sermonettes for Christianettes”—little vignettes that are nice and interesting. Sometimes they make you feel warm, fuzzy, sad, or excited. But seldom do we hear doctrine taught or discussed as a result of such insubstantial messages. Very few teachers explain the truths about God, life, death, heaven, hell, man, sin, Christ, angels, the Holy Spirit, the position of the believer, the flesh, or the world. But we need truths we can hold onto. Pastors need to read a text, find out what it means, extract a divine truth, and establish that truth in the minds of their people by expounding it.

I picked up that style of preaching when I graduated from high school. My father gave me a Bible and wrote a note in it encouraging me to read 1 and 2 Timothy. I did that, and Paul’s message to Timothy kept running through my mind: “In pointing out these things to the brethren, you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus, constantly nourished on the words of the faith and of the sound doctrine, which you have been following” (1 Tim. 4:6; cf. 1:3, 10; 4:13, 16).

Early in my ministry at Grace Community Church, I taught from the book of Ephesians, explaining a believer’s position in Christ. That study was foundational to the church. Years later I visited with my former high school football coach, whom I hadn’t seen for a long time. He’s a wonderful Christian man who also teaches the Word of God. We were reminiscing about some of the silly things that happened when I played football in high school. Then he said to me, “John, you have made concrete for me the position of the believer in Christ. I have listened to your tapes on Ephesians chapter 1 many times and taught from that passage repeatedly over the years to young people. Understanding the doctrine of the believer’s position in Jesus Christ has given me a foundation for my entire life.”

I didn’t give my former coach that foundation; the book of Ephesians and the Holy Spirit did. The point is that people need solid doctrine on which to build their lives.

## PERSONAL HOLINESS

We must maintain firm standards of personal holiness and be careful what we expose ourselves and our children to. It is impossible to watch many of the films in movie theatres and read trashy literature



without paying a price. I sometimes wonder what is going through the minds of Christians who expose themselves to movies, television programs, Internet sites, DVDs, and publications that propagate immorality and an unbiblical value system.

We dare not lower our standards to be closer to those of the world. What our society tolerates is shocking. Things that were not spoken of except in hushed whispers twenty-five years ago are now openly flaunted. I wonder how our culture could degenerate so far in such a short time. God calls Christians to live a pure life, and we can't compromise that. We should enforce a standard of purity among ourselves.

Second Corinthians 7:1 says, "Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God." A church should enforce that standard and confront unrepentant sinners in the church (see Matt. 18:15–17). That's why we implement church discipline at Grace Church. (See appendix 4, "Elements of Church Discipline," for more details on this vital topic.)

Many Christians aren't as concerned about their personal holiness as they should be. Where are you in terms of holiness and real communion with the living God? We can't live half-committed Christian lives and expect God to accomplish His work through us.

### SPIRITUAL AUTHORITY

One more component that belongs in the skeletal structure of a church is spiritual authority. A church must understand that Christ is its Head (Eph. 1:22; 4:15), and that He mediates His rule in the church through godly elders (1 Thess. 5:13–14; Heb. 13:7, 17).

Hebrews 13:17 says to submit to those over you in the Lord, "for they keep watch over your souls." Follow their example. First Thessalonians 5 says to "appreciate those who diligently labor among you, and have charge over you in the Lord and give you instruction, and that you esteem them very highly in love because of their work" (vv. 12–13).

We have many leaders at Grace Church; I'm just one of them. I just happen to be the one whom God chose to preach. Jesus had twelve apostles. Every time there is a list of them, Peter's name is first (Matt. 10:2–4; Mark 3:16–19; Luke 6:14–16; Acts 1:13). He was always the spokesman. That doesn't mean he was better than the others. He simply had the gift of speaking, and the others were gifted in other ways.

## THE SKELETAL STRUCTURE



Because of Peter's leading role, you might think the apostle John didn't say much. But he wrote the gospel of John, three New Testament letters that bear his name, and the book of Revelation. There is no doubt that with the intimate friendship John had with Christ, he could have shared more great things. But every time he was with Peter in the first twelve chapters of Acts, he was silent. Why? Because Peter had the gift of speaking.

Barnabas was a great teacher and a leader in the early church. But when he and Paul traveled together, even unbelievers realized that Paul was the chief speaker.

So, there are variations in the giftedness of spiritual leaders. But in totality, there is still an equality of spiritual authority given to those whom the Bible calls elders or overseers. (For greater detail on church leadership, see appendix 3, "Qualifications for Spiritual Leadership.")

In summary, if the church is going to be the body of Christ, it has to have the right framework. It has to have a high view of God. The pursuit of a church should be to know God. In seeking to know Him, the church must recognize the authority of the Scripture, for it is only through faith in the revealed Word that we can know the Lord. A church should have a high view of Scripture and a commitment to the teaching of sound doctrine. The people of a church should also seek personal holiness and submit their souls to the care of those the Lord has placed over them as spiritual authorities.

### NOTE

1. See *Parables of Kierkegaard*, ed. Thomas C. Oden (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Univ. Press, 1978), 89–90.