



September 16, 2005

Dear Friend,

The trend is hard to miss and heartbreaking: A growing number of churches don't seem to take Scripture very seriously, and a considerable number of Christians are suffering for it.

That troubling trend is the subject of a new message I want to send you free of charge. Titled "The Long War on the Truth," it's a critical look at some dangerous trends and bad ideas that are being smuggled right into the church. Sometimes, the purveyors of error are people who seem benign enough, call themselves Christians, and even join the community of believers. From there they unleash their deadly influence in subtle but very destructive ways. I call them "spiritual terrorists."

Some spiritual terrorists are people who operate in the shadows by quietly sowing discord, undermining sound doctrine, or sniping at church leaders. In the worst cases, however, spiritual terrorists may ascend to leadership themselves. "The Long War on the Truth" shows you how you can recognize them. It's an important message I want you to hear. To receive your free copy, just fill out the enclosed response card and return it to us.

I had two goals in preaching this message. The first was to equip pastors and church leaders to recognize and resist the tactics of spiritual terrorism that have weakened the church. My second goal, and what's most on my heart as I offer this message to you, is a desire to help people who are discouraged and confused by the spiritual decline of so many churches these days. You may know firsthand what it's like not to be fed at church.

Earlier this week, I received a letter from a woman—one of our listeners—who feels the pangs of spiritual malnourishment. Her words express better than I can the importance of Grace to You and the role your support plays in the lives of so many.

Dear Pastor John,

I just want to let you know how much I appreciate Grace to You. I have been blessed and encouraged so much by your

The Bible Teaching of John MacArthur

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expository preaching. Verse-by-verse preaching is hard to find nowadays. Many churches water down the preaching to be seeker sensitive, including the church I am attending with my husband and kids. The messages we hear are more of the "cherry-picking" type (a verse here, a verse there to support the outline), but the pastor rarely goes in depth or explains the context of the few verses he does use.

I am so blessed to be able to listen to your preaching on my own to learn more about God's Word—I hunger and thirst for it. I just want to say thanks for your faithfulness to preach the whole counsel of God, verse by verse. I will continue to support the Grace to You ministry so others can be blessed in the same way.

Rejoicing in Christ,
Jeannie

Jeannie's words will resonate with you or someone you know. I am convinced this is the most urgent problem facing the church today: We desperately need to revive the clear and faithful teaching of God's Word.

Nowadays there are many communities without a single church upholding a genuine commitment to biblical truth and the faithful preaching of God's Word. With so many churches aiming to tickle the ears of worldly people, multitudes of Christians are starving.

While I would like to believe that most Christians are being properly fed by their local churches, the evidence we receive at Grace to You tells a different story. Letters like Jeannie's come to us almost every day, and the most common question listeners ask us is, "What do I do now?"

I've thought about this issue a great deal—I've had to. There are rarely easy answers to give someone who is concerned about the preaching, the depth, or the direction of his or her church. But I've discovered a few principles that many people have found helpful.

The first thing I tell people is, don't give up on the local church. Christ loved the church and gave Himself for it. It's the only institution He ever said He would build. The church is His bride. And if you truly love Christ, you need to be part of the church in an active and visible sense.

Certainly, we're glad to know Grace to You is helping feed hungry Christians, but we've always been clear on this point: We are not a substitute for the fellowship of a local church; we are a supplement and support. Our goal is to serve your church and its leaders—not to compete or distract. Nothing can replace personal involvement in a congregation. Giving up isn't an option.

Also, be part of the solution, not part of the problem. Wherever you are, you should seek out the church in your community that is most faithful to Scripture. Find a way to use your gifts in ministry there, and be faithful. Do not be content to sit on the shore waiting for the tide to change; get involved.

After all, even in an imperfect church, God can bless your faithfulness. In His message to the church at Sardis in Revelation 3, Christ makes special note of the few believers who had remained faithful in the midst of that nearly-dead church. In other words, God understands that faithful Christians will find themselves in unfaithful, weak churches.

Just remember it is no accident you are part of a struggling church. God has put you there and gifted you for a reason. Look for ways and places in which God can use you to be a purifying influence.

Also, know that there may come a point where you need to leave. Don't stay in a bad church if there's a better one nearby. And don't stay in an apostate church—a church that has abandoned the gospel completely—under any circumstance. But don't abandon fellowship with other Christians completely.

The Bible leaves no room for forsaking the fellowship of other believers (Hebrews 10:25). So if there really is not a single church in your community where the gospel is believed and preached, you need to seek out other believers, or evangelize your unbelieving neighbors and meet with them to study the Bible and pray together. Informal living-room gatherings like that have often been the seed from which wonderful churches have grown.

And find refuge in the truth of James 1. The Lord uses the trials you face—yes, even a weak church or poor preaching—to strengthen your faith and conform you more to His image. He is not surprised by your situation, He's not limited by a church's failings, and His work in your life won't be hindered.

Finally, listen to preaching that feeds your soul. If your church isn't nourishing you, seek out spiritual food wherever you can. Find reliable ministries and make the most of what they provide through radio, CD, tape, book, the Internet, or other media.

As I think about the discouragement, frustration, and challenge so many people face when they hunger for the simple teaching of God's truth but don't find it, I'm energized about Grace to You.

Many people depend on us as a lifeline. We are a vital conduit of truth for believers who love God's Word and want to grow in their knowledge, understanding, and application. We stand ready and eager to fill in the gaps and provide people with verse-by-verse Bible teaching. This ministry meets very real needs in people's lives.

In a similar way, you are a lifeline for Grace to You. Everything we do is made possible through what the Lord provides, as He encourages men and women like you to give. If you believe in what we stand for and want to make a difference in the lives of spiritually hungry people, please prayerfully consider giving to Grace to You today.

Your support is especially important this month. Many people will understandably be giving to support relief efforts in the wake of Hurricane Katrina. We've all been touched by what we've seen, and many of us will want to respond. As you do, please remember our ongoing needs as well. Historically, we see a downturn in support when natural disasters come. Anything you can do to help offset that downturn will be greatly appreciated, and put to kingdom use.

I thank the Lord for your friendship to me and to this ministry. If the Lord has blessed you with a church where Scripture is cherished and taught, remember to be thankful. And remember that through your support of Grace to You, you are helping provide the clear teaching of God's Word to many who have no other way of receiving it. On behalf of all the men and women who rely on Grace to You, thank you.

Love in the Truth,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'John', with a stylized flourish extending from the end.

John MacArthur
Pastor-Teacher

P.S. Don't forget to request your free copy of my sermon "The Long War on the Truth" by filling out the enclosed response card. Even if you can't include a gift for Grace to You, let this sermon be our gift to you.