Mobilizing the Church

By James P. Moreland

J.P. Moreland:

I know that we're a group of people that have similar hearts. We might not agree on everything, but we certainly agree on a lot together. Now, if you're here this morning, and you are not a follower of Jesus of Nazareth, you're welcome. We're glad you're here. You'll have an opportunity to hear a little bit about what those of us who love Him are like, and you get to sit in on a little family conversation today. I'm going to be making assumptions that Christianity is true for the purposes of this seminar. I'm not going to be doing any attempt to argue for that, or to try to contend for the truth of the Christian religion. I make that assumption because I take it to be the case that the vast majority of us have already come into a relationship with Jesus Christ. And so I address now, my brothers and sisters; and we have an opportunity to study today, and talk and eat lunch together, and just to be a family together and it's just, it's fun to do these sorts of things when we can carve time out of our schedules and think together as brothers and sisters.

Last night, what I tried to do was to give you what I think has been happening to us in the culture. If you'll recall, I tried to say that American society is in deep trouble. That was hardly shocking to anyone, I don't think. But I tried to spell out why that's true. And I laid a certain pattern of cultural development that has been happening in my mind--it hasn't been just happening in my mind, in my mind it has been happening, for some time. And it had to do, I think, with some strategic assaults that were raised against the church, and the churches dropping the ball in fundamental ways; not that anybody tried to do that, but that had happened. A cultural
vacuum was created that was secular; science came to dominate as the gatekeeper of what can be known and what cannot be known. And as we'll see today, whoever controls knowledge controls the right to assert what is real and reasonable, and what is unreal and irrational. And whoever it is that controls knowledge in a culture will control the culture. They'll control the culture. And today, the universities control the culture. It's not the media. It's the university. The media follows the university. So we now have a secular paradigm. Within that paradigm robust moral vision is not possible. Instead we have individual or cultural relativism prevailing that places an emphasis on individual liberties and rights. Religion has become privatized, and as long as you keep it to yourself you're Okay. On the college campus, now, political correctness has emerged as an attempt to give people something to give their lives to when they can't do with religion any longer, and they don't have any absolute truths to give themselves to. So they give themselves to promulgating and promoting their version of tolerance, which at bottom, is an attempt to make them feel okay about their own dysfunctionality.

Now you have to--let's assume for a minute that there is a God and that people were really made, that were really, made for Him and they know what in their hearts. Now I've debated and argued for Christianity in Lord knows how many places for 25 years, and I'll tell you I believe in arguing. I wouldn't be heading up a master's program in philosophy if I didn't believe in doing that sort of thing. But nevertheless, I'll tell you that people know down in their guts they were made for God. They know that. Now, when you turn away from that and you begin to engage in behaviors that are not the way you were designed to function. There's going to be some sort of discordance down in there. So when people begin to have to express a need to live for something, because we all need something to live for, and they begin to do it in a politically correct way, where they're promoting and working out, pushing, tolerance, it has a
texture to it of being oppressive and arrogant. And you can tell because if somebody comes up
with a conservative or Christian argument about something, and they simply want to get it out on
the playing field and talk about it, get is as a part of the discussion, you can tell by the reaction
that's raised against it that the issue is not solely intellectual, but it is really an attempt for people.
You're hitting people at something that is enabling them to cope with their own hurts. Hope I'm
making sense to you on this.

Phil Johnson, friend of mine, who's written a book on creation and evolution. How many
of you've heard of Phil Johnson? We talked, I talked to him recently and he's lectured on creation
at various schools. I tell you, he can't even get a discussion going in a lot of places. And that tells
us something. So this is where we're at, like it or not. We're in a culture now that really doesn't
believe that religion should be accepted because it's true. In fact it's really irrelevant that a
religion be true. You talk to new age people. They don't care, per say, if their religion is true.
They're not interested in those questions. What they want to know is: does it satisfy whatever it
is they're looking for in their religion. That's the issue now, see. Now, I submit to you this
morning that it has been the church, it has been we, no blame here, but we're the ones who have
helped to contribute to this problem. If Jesus of Nazareth made an interesting statement, made
several interesting statements, and you know He was a fairly bright person. He really was. And I
want to recommend that you think of Him in that way once in a while. We tend to think of Him
as the Son of God all the time, which He was. But it's a good idea to think of Him as a fairly
bright individual that just may have had something to say on a few occasions that should be
studied intensely. And He made the statement that you and I were the salt of the earth. He didn't
say we were supposed to try to be, He said we were. And if we failed to be salt, and if the meat
turned out to be salt-less, sooner or later the salt has got to ask itself questions, not the meat.
Okay? And that's what I want to get at this morning. Now again, you must understand that my heart is not a heart to try to find blame. I'm going to be saying some things about the local church this morning, and then if you agree with me it's not time to run to your pastor and say "fire him, lynch him!" No, no, that's not what we're doing here. He is, He's on the team, or they are on the team. So this is just an attempt to talk.

Now, the first session I want to talk a little bit about mobilizing the church and I want to give you some ideas that I want you to think about. I'd like you to turn to session one in your notes and I want to pick up where I left off. I can't cover all of this this morning. In fact, I never intended to, I need to change the notes because some of this would just take too long. But I want to comment on Roman numeral three: characteristics of the church. And then I want to move in to some ideas about the church that I hope will be helpful to you. After that, I'd like to begin talking up until lunch about moral reasoning in a secular culture, and then after lunch about apologetics on the university campus and the main movements that are happening. Now to begin with, I want to say that I'd like for you, if you would, to basically forget that you are part of the church, and I'd like to talk all over again with you about what a church is supposed to be.

Now for some of you that are in college, it's probably the case that your primary religious identification is in a group like Campus Crusade, or InterVarsity, or Navigators, and that's fine. And it may be that you're so busy, you're so identified with your college community, that you don't spend much time thinking about the local church, and that's fine. I mean, I'm not trying to make you feel guilty about that. I think though, at your age, if you're a young person of that age, 18 to 22, it's a good idea for you to begin, right now, thinking about what you think a church ought to be according to the New Testament, and trying to come up with what, if I were to sit down and sketch out what a local church would be, from the New Testament only, What would
the church be doing? What would it look like? Now the reason it's important to do that is that we all gain our views of things partially by osmosis; just by kind of floating around. We pick up our views about what churches are supposed to be because that's the only thing we've ever seen. And for somebody like me to come in and, as I'm going to suggest later, and say we ought to start charging 75 dollars for Sunday school classes, and people look at you and think, "Who's this guy? The University of Mars, is that where this is?" and I hope not.

So I want to make a distinction first between form and function and then I will move into Roman numeral 3 on these sheets here. The functions are biblical absolutes that the church must do. Functions are biblical absolutes that the church has got to be sure it’s doing. These are the teachings of the New Testament as to what the church is supposed to do. An example of that would be equipping the Saints, teaching the Scriptures, worshipping God collectively; alright, Sustaining, maintaining the Lord's Supper, and that sort of thing. And there is a handful of absolutes in the New Testament about what the church has got to be sure it’s doing. Forms are culturally relative ways of accomplishing those functions. Forms are culturally relative ways of accomplishing those functions. When it comes to forms, we have freedom to do whatever we want to do. There is no absolute about it. And the question that we should raise, regarding our forms, is: are they effective in accomplishing our functions? Are they effective in accomplishing our functions? And these are questions that we should have as a part of our ecclesiology, or our understanding of the local church. So we must distinguish between form and function. We must absolutize, or treat as objectively true, the functions. But the forms are relative; we have freedom in Christ do whatever we want to there.

Now on the note 3, Here, I want to begin by saying that, in my opinion, the notion of a senior pastor is an unbiblical notion. I do not believe that there should be things called senior
pastors. If I were to say that, if I were to put my finger on any single thing that has damaged the church, it has been the idea that we ought to have a person called a minister, and I'm going to try to argue that now. Okay, if you will take a look at Hebrews 13:17, if you have a Bible. Hebrews 13:17. Matthew, Mark, Luke, Hebrews.

[Audience laughter]

See, we philosophers do use the Scriptures occasionally. Hebrews 13:17. We have advice given to local churches, and I want you to notice something very interesting about this advice. The writer to The Book of Hebrews--or the writer of The Book of Hebrews, wasn't writing to the book--says this "obey your leaders and submit to them. For they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account; let them do this with joy, not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you." Now I want you to notice that the word leaders is in the plural. It isn't submit to your leader. It isn't submit to the leaders, but there is one of them that's more a leader than the rest of them. But the word leaders is in the plural. The idea that we--there's nothing in this passage, that I can see, that there's one person who's a little bit more of a leader than everybody else.

Now let's turn over to another passage here Philippians chapter 1. Philippians chapter 1. Paul is writing to his favorite church in the New Testament. This is the church of all of the churches he liked more than any of them, arguably. He loves these people. There's a special place in his heart for this church. And this is "Paul and Timothy, bond servants of Christ Jesus, to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi," there was only one church there, "including the overseers or elders if you wish "and deacons." Now again, there is, this is a group that's been in,
that's in the plural, and it appears that at the Church of Phillip High there was a group of people
that were considered the overseers of the church, the rulers, the leaders, of the church.

In Acts 20:28. One more example here. Acts 20:28. Paul is having a meeting with the
Ephesians elders. He's on his way to Jerusalem and he is giving them a final departure. And he
says to them in verse 28 "be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock. Among whom the
Holy Spirit has made you overseers; to shepherd the Church of God which he purchased with his
own blood." Great proof for the deity of Christ, by the way. Now, obviously again we have the
notion of a plurality of leaders. There's not a single leader in the church, and in my opinion, the
idea that there should be one person over the church came later in church history, and it was, I
think, a mistake. Now why am I pounding on this? Because the idea that we ought to have a
senior pastor, given the contemporary culture, is more lethal than it was 75 to 100 years ago. 75
to 100 years ago, the idea that we should have senior pastors was still wrong, in my opinion. But
the error was not as damaging because there was enough else in the culture to where it didn't, it
wasn't as harmful. But that's not true today. For example, this still stays under the senior pastor
syndrome; the senior pastor model of a local church tends to create passivity in the people of
God. People tend to come and they have empty selves, they're empty inside, and they are looking
for a place to plug in their television umbilical cord. Now again, I'm not putting anybody down.
I'm merely stating that this is the way it is. We are passive dependent people.

A study was done that shows, especially men, and I don't--I'm a man, and I don't mean to
hurt us, brothers--but frankly, men in this country, because of the way we're raised, tend to be
passive, dependent individuals; and, unless it's at work, and we tend to want to look for a
situation where we can be passive and dependent. And of course, you get a senior pastor, who
has an inordinate need to be significant, and people who need to have dependency needs, and
you get a co-dependency situation set up where you both become enablers of the other person's
on healthiness. Now, nobody sits down and says "let's set up a situation where we can all stay sick." Okay? Now, you understand that. I'm at a church, and I make known, I'm not trying to hurt
anybody's feelings, but I'm in a church where Reverend Chuck Swindoll's the pastor, I have deep
admiration for the man, I think he's a man of God, I really do. I think he has a deep heart for the
Lord. But the truth is that, now that he's leaving the church, it becomes apparent that there are
not, by this time, 200-300 leaders that are equipped to teach the scriptures, and to share the
teaching ministry from the pulpit every Sunday. And by the time a church has been around 20
years, there ought to be at least 40 or 50 people who've had a chance to study Greek and Hebrew
in the church, that know how to exegete the text, they can give messages, and they are preaching
at various Sundays. Right? Now, we'll talk about that a little bit later on. I'm just trying to warm
you up to some of these ideas ahead of time here. I don't want you to start leaving.

Now, you know I planted three churches. So I'm not just a philosopher; a pipe smoking,
Talbot Professor-philosopher in an ivory tower that sits around and says "well now let's see what
I can spin out to alienate the people of God this week." You know, I've been I've been a minister,
I've done this. I have done this. I know it works. More importantly, I believe it's true. But, it also
I think, works. This kind of a senior pastor syndrome creates celebrityism. It creates
celebrityism. Now folks, remember when Magic Johnson came out with AIDS, or the HIV,
excuse me, and he said he was going to leave the Lakers? Remember the outcry in Los Angeles
of sadness. Why? Why? Because they love, there's a pro athlete they love to watch, and they're
sad he's leaving the team because they like the team? Part of it. Part of it can explain the intensity
of the reaction. Why was the reaction so deep and sad? Answer: people don't have lives of their
own anymore, and so they live their lives by a surrogate. They get their self-image from the
heroes that they set up, and they are okay if they're heroes do well, and they're not okay if their heroes don't do well. And when Magic Johnson was taken, part of what helped many, many people in Los Angeles cope with the emptiness in their own lives was taken away from them. Now, you get a culture of people that are addicted to passivity and who needs celebrities. And that's why People Magazine, and The National Enquirer, and all this stuff is flourishing; and that's why the TV magazines, Inside Edition and so on, flourish because we all feel like our lives are boring and uninteresting, and if we can get a little fix from kind of this stuff in other people's lives, then we can prop up our own emptiness.

You get people coming to a church and you have a senior pastor, you walk in the front door and somebody says "where's the minister?" And if somebody actually can answer that question, instead of saying "well there they are. Here are the ministers." But, "there he is." You're already setting yourself up for celebrityism if you're not careful. This kind of thing tends to set the minister up for failure; tends to set the minister up for failure for a lot of reasons. I mean for one thing, the minister doesn't have a genuine accountability group. Moreover, there's not a person alive that can preach, I don't think, more than 30 messages a year and not rely on his speaking gifts. Look I'll tell you, I've tried it. You know what happens if you have to preach every week for more than, gosh I would even say more than 25 Sundays a year? But what happens is you start relying upon your ability to package messages. And if some people are real good at that, and you know how to structure a message. And you win on your speaking abilities; you don't have time to internalize the scriptures. You don't have time to live in a passage for a long time, so that it's coming from your gut. It's coming from your skills. And that's nobody's-- I'm not blaming anybody--I'm just telling you that that if a person is up front more than 25 Sundays a year, that's going to happen. It's going to happen. And so then the minister ends up
getting emptier. This can happen. Doesn't have accountability. He knows a lot of the stuff's not really coming from his heart, he wants it to. It's not that he's trying to be--it's just it's not as fair situation.

Now don't misunderstand me. You get women in the church that have a certain personality type, call this a hysterical neurosis, where--no, I'm serious. There is a certain profile of women that needs to take it to tear down male authority figures to, because of their own working their stuff out, and they target the minister. They go after him; if they can get him to commit an affair, then they can save them themselves, "I'm not so bad after all, because these hot shot male leaders who think they're everything have let me down again." Now I'm not making this up. I make a lot of things up, but I'm not making this up.

[Audience laughter]

Now it's unhealthy folks. Okay? It's not healthy. And you've got to explain to me how a person can be at an evangelical church for 20 years, and still know almost nothing about the old and new testaments, or about theology. You walk into a church and you ask a person who's been there 20 years; cultists come to my door, and I always invite them in. Regularly invite them in. I ask my children my wife to come and sit in the living room, and we just have a nice talk. And I always try to let kids in on this sort of thing. And so I've asked cultists, I say to them regularly, you take the Bible out of context: "no I don't." "Yes you do." "No I don't" "yes you do." Don't, do, don't, do. And I say "I'll prove it to you, I'll prove it to you. I say there's 66 books in the Bible. Pick any one you want, any one, and trace the argument of the book for me. What was the original audience, who was written to, what's the main theme of the book, Give me the major
divisions of the book if you can--not in great detail, just what are the major divisions of the book." And I've never met a cultist yet that can do it. The bad news, is there aren't many Christians that can, and this is not a guild thing it's just that if you're in the teaching ministry of the church, part of the teaching ministry of the church is to equip people to enter into a deeper understanding of their theology. Alright? Now if we're not doing this, is this is our function.

It's clear our forms aren't accomplishing this. What we've got to do is change the forms. Now, letter B; because of this of the senior pastor syndrome, we tend to rely on rhetoric instead of reason. We tend, in the way we communicate from the pulpit, we rely upon speaking techniques to convince people of things, instead of serious reasoning; instead of serious reasoning. And the reason for that is that the sermon has come to be a performance, not a lecture that is motivational, as well. I mean it's not--I don't want it to ever just be a lecture, it should be more than that, but it ought to be a lecture that includes exhortation, and passion, and that sort of thing. I don't mean a dry lecture. But there ought to be education going on from the pulpit, instead of it being a performance of entertainment. So it's very easy for us, then, to try to win on public speaking. Yes. And you ask pastoral search committees what they're looking for in a communicator, and it's somebody that's interesting. I'm for I'm all for that, okay? I'm not against that, but we need to go a lot further than that. And sermons ought to be educational and equipping. Now how do we accomplish that?

Let me give you an example. Church I pastored with a group of other elders, we were the pastor teachers. We had a group. I was one of the elders in the church. I was paid for what I did. I was an elder worthy of double honor, that's what we called it. And I drove my income from the ministry. We went through a series on 1 Peter for 12 weeks, 14 weeks. We purchased 100 commentaries on 1 Peter, paperbacks about 10 bucks each, and distributed and made them
available to the people before the series started. Told them where we'd be each Sunday, gave them the pages and the commentary to read before they came to church, urged them to do their own study of the text, and gave them materials to do that before we got up. Now, when you're looking at 500 people, and you know at least a hundred of those folks have read and studied the passage before you get up, I got news for you: you're not going to wing it on Sunday. And instead of the glorification of the word ceremony at the back afterwards, you know, "Well that was a wonderful message, Reverend Moreland." You started getting people saying things like "you know, I don't buy that third point that you gave up, I think it could have gone this way."

[Audience laughter]

And you're thinking, "Well maybe I'd better go back and do my homework." It just creates a much more engaged ambiance. Now, I don't want to go any further in this, but I am suggesting that we take more seriously the plurality of leadership in the local church. The idea that the local church is to be a plural group of leaders, and that we role model that upfront.

Let me give you one more practical suggestion, then we'll turn to the session 2 notes. Again, you may not be able to do anything about this, but I'm suggesting that if you're a part of a local church you begin to talk about this: why not have at least 7 or 8 different people share the pulpit ministry? Where a person does maybe a 4 to 6, maybe 8 week series, and then they're not on for 5 months or 4 months. And that you have other people come in. That allows the person who's teaching from the pulpit a chance to know: I've got four months, I'm going to start living in the passage I'm teaching, I've got time to internalize this, so that when I get up I've really lived through the text. Moreover, moreover. The church is not structured around one person's agenda
and personality. They get several types of personalities that are poured through the scriptures, and it touches different people. Now what you start doing, is you start allowing, quote "laypeople," I hate that word. There is no such thing--I don't know what else to say. People in the congregation with the gift of teaching to begin sharing the pulpit ministry, after they've had appropriate training. And what the pastor-teachers are to do, is to work themselves out of the job, so that they're not doing much as much from the pulpit as they used to. Now you think: "What? Well then what are we paying him for?" Uh-huh.

Session 2; session 2, okay. I'm saying, let's actually think, about the church as an educational institution. Let's think about that, and try to put our hats on and see where it goes. In this session, I want to begin, one of my objectives, is to think about the church as an educational institution. To think about the church as an educational institution. And then the second thing I want to do in this session, my second objective, is to look at moral relativism. I want to look at moral relativism, and begin to do some work on how to think ethically in a secular culture.

Roman numeral number one here, because of time this morning, I'm not going to look at these passages in detail, but I want you to have them before you because Romans 12:1 and 2, Matthew 22:37-39, 1 Peter 3:15, and Acts 17 through 19 all emphasize the fact that the mind and the intellect, and its cultivation, is central to Christian formation. That the cultivation of the mind and the intellect, being transformed by the renewal of the mind, loving God with the mind, being ready to give an answer to anybody that asks you why you believe something, reasoning and arguing and debating--not being argumentative, but arguing, you can argue without being argumentative--that this is simply the way we go about what we do. You know that in Acts 19 and 20, Paul set up the school of Tyrannus, and for 2 years he did something, and all of Asia heard the gospel. What do you think he was doing? I can tell you what he was doing. He was
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giving public lectures on the reasonableness of Christianity, in light of the things people were grappling with. I know that from his speeches and so on in Acts. Are you tracking with me? That means that in a New Testament ministry, the life of the mind is central to what we do. Nurturing the mind, cultivating it. I've often said: if every local church had a group of people in that body that were responsible for training the rest of the church and for addressing the culture intellectually, and writing letters to the editor, engaging in thoughtful reflection about the culture situation, we wouldn't be in the corner we're in today. If we had schools of Tyrannus at every local church. We wouldn't be in the situation we're in today. Now, I'm simply saying now, that the mind is not opposed to faith. I'm not going to beat this drum any more, I assume most of you, I'm preaching to the choir on this one. That's why I'm not going to take time looking at these passages. If you'll assume this with me now, if you'll assume that faith and reason work together, not against each other, and if you will assume that the mind came from God, and not the devil; it can be misused, but it's a faculty that God designed, and that one of the main things that the church has to do is to nurture it in its members lives.

Then let's take a look at one other thing, and this is Ephesians 4. And then I want to draw some practical applications. For you college students, especially, if you're, I hope, early in the process of asking "what do I believe a church should look like?" I want to recommend that Ephesians 4:11 through 16 be the major passage you study; and study this passage and ask what would a church look like if it were doing this? And here's what the text says: Ephesians 4, beginning verse 11, "he gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers for the equipping of the Saints for the work of service to the building up of the body of Christ. Until we all attain, to the unity of faith, and to the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man; to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of
Christ." You see, the measure of our ministry is the degree to which the people in the body are maturing, and reaching a certain level of stature as Christians. Do you understand, that right there means that we shouldn't pitch everything we do to the lowest common denominator. Now think about this with me. This means that regularly part of our sermons should shoot over the heads of roughly half the congregation. There ought to be regular times when half the congregation comes out and says "I couldn't follow that, it was over my head." Now, we shouldn't do that every Sunday. It ought to be mixed up, you understand. You want to do that some, to hold a standard up for people to have to deepen their thinking abilities. But you don't want to frustrate, so sometimes you need to have messages that are for people that have other kinds of needs. Do you understand? You're not putting people down. But if we constantly pitch our messages to the lowest common denominator in the church, the people that need more and want to think are either going to leave the church, or they're going to have to find ways of getting that outside the church. They're not going to get it in church, you’ve got to come to seminars. You all look so pious; that's why you're here.

[Audience laughter]

Now, Paul says as a result, we're not going to be cast around by every wind of doctrine, and we'll be mature. Now I want you to notice something about this passage. First of all, it emphasizes plurality. God has given you and others a spiritual gift to serve the body. This is not new to you. Everybody in this room has got at least one spiritual gift. That's a present, not to you, it's a present to all of us that's given to you to give to the rest of us. You get the joy of using it but it's really a gift that's given all of us through you. You're a gift to us. You're a gift to everybody
else. What a concept! See, there's plurality here. Now what this means is, then, that these gifts need to be cultivated. And what is the mark of the exercise of these spiritual gifts? Let me give you one tip. How can you tell if somebody has got the gift of evangelism? Well, no, fruits of the Spirit belong to everybody. It was the gift of evangelism. I mean that's just what we're all to manifest; are the fruits of this fruit of the spirit. But what would be the mark of the gift of evangelism?

Speaker 1:

When the person goes out and witnesses very effectively.

J.P. Moreland:

Yes.

Speaker 1:

This may be in opposition to what you're saying, but maybe without necessarily having to pray a lot about it beforehand, they're just that effective.

J.P. Moreland:

Okay, okay. I really appreciate you answering this way because that's part of it, but can I disagree? If that's okay with you? Because I think that's part of it. But at the end, this is the way this has been taught. The answer often is given that a person with the gift of evangelism, you can tell, because they're successful and fruitful in evangelism. No. According to this passes the test of a person who has the gift of evangelism is their success in equipping other people to do
evangelism. See, if I have the gift of evangelism that means that I should be gathering around me, over a period of time, others that I've equipped to do evangelism and they should be fruitful. Now, your answer is right, because I need to have that first, obviously, and I think you're right. If I have that gift, I will exercise it. But you see, the way I really flesh out my gift is doing what? Is in equipping everybody else to do this. Do you see that? Now. So what we've got is gifts that are given to the church for the purpose of equipping the brothers and sisters to do the work of ministry. Now do you see that what this would do, if we thought this way, is that we would say that those who are teachers in the body have, as their primary job description, training other teachers in the body, not doing all the teaching. Now, they'll teach. But they exist to teach others to teach. You understand that? People with the gift of helps and mercy exist to teach others and to train others how to exercise mercy and helps; things of that sort.

Now what this does is it decentralizes and that should, instead of saying "a-centralization" that ought to be "decentralization." This decentralizes ministry. Now follow me on this. The way we think of it now, the ministry happens where the minister is: inside the building. So the church comes, and the church's ministry takes place in the building when the minister is ministering, and we come and cheer him on, and we promote his ministry, we help his ministry. We volunteer to do things, we work for his ministry; the church's, ministry his ministry. The view I'm recommending is that the primary job of those leading the church is to move into the spheres of influence of its members and equip people to exercise their gifts in those spheres of influence. For the body is good when they're gathered, of course, but when they're scattered. And this will emphasize a decentralization and an equipping aspect of the church. Now see, folks, this is what we've got to do right here. And I'm telling you, the reason we lost about 50 years ago is that the church was anti-intellectual. And one of the reasons we're losing now is that
the church is still anti-intellectual. It's not the only reason, we need spiritual maturity and depth, too. And I'm not talking about that this weekend much because that's not my purpose. But my point is that the church is an educational, intellectual center of ideas.

It is other things, I'm not denying that, but it is a center of intellectual reflection and ideas. And it is to engage in equipping the Saints to do evangelism, and to teach, and to propagate the gospel, and to minister in the community. Now you are you tracking with me on this? Now, so that makes me ask the question: are our forms accomplishing this? Well after 5-6-7 years of my ministry in a local church, have I begun to turn the pulpit over to other people? Do I find now that there are people who are sophisticated enough in their thinking to communicate their Christian religion through what they're practicing? If they're lawyers they understand a little bit about Christianity and law, and that kind of thing, in an intelligent way. Am I helping mothers that have children in elementary school understand the nature of public school education and how to interact in a helpful way as volunteers in a cultural matrix like that? Things of that sort.

Now here's some practical suggestions. By orientation, then, we see the church primarily as an educational institution, or at least largely, that's a main part of who we are. First Timothy 3:15 says that the church is the pillar and support of the truth, not the university. The church is the pillar and support of the truth, not the university. And we have an outward orientation; we are decentralizing ministry. Let me give you some suggestions now by way of practical suggestion. Then we'll talk a little bit, and then move on to something else.

Again the first thing I'm recommending, as I've already said, is that we need to break the pulpit ministry up to several individuals, and begin to give gifted lay-teachers in the church the training they need to move into that position from time to time. Okay? Does that make sense? I'm going to just list a bunch of ideas for you. Secondly, every service we ought to have a
testimony from somebody in the church as to their ministry and what's happening in their ministry. That is, we ought to just have people regularly have about 3 or 4 minutes in the service to tell the body what they're doing in their own ministry; if it's a mom, how they're administering at the public school, and whatever it is. Now what would this do? This would give people the idea that we are all in this and doing things. And you start getting encouraged. Well so-and-so has got a ministry. What's my ministry? You understand, it role models, every week, the war stories of different members of the body and what they're doing in their ministry.

The church library ought to be substantive and beefy. I bet, I've gotten in trouble on this one before. Now I'm going to try to be nice about this, but we need significant church libraries. And let me tell you what we need to do with the church library. We need to have a group of volunteers every Sunday that cart 300-500 books to the lobby of the church, so that when people go into the service they trip over the books before they get in. Now, when I was one of the elders at a church in Baltimore, we did that. We had a 12,000 volume library and we had roughly 500 volumes that were on display, of various types, right there in the lobby. And when people came in and out of the services it was as easy as pie to check a book out. They didn't have to walk to some building that was 150 yards away. You know when people started doing? Don't tell anybody this. They started checking books, out and a few of them actually started reading those books. It was unbelievable. It's kind of odd the way this sort of thing works; that actually started happening.

We ought to start having two different kinds of Sunday school classes. I've got two more suggestions for you. And then we'll open it up for questions. We have two different kinds of Sunday school classes. The first kind is the regular Sunday school that already exists to enfold people, and to give people a chance to have a low commitment but meaningful interaction with
other people in a smaller setting in the church. So you've got small groups, then you've got the main church, and you've got an intermediate sized thing. If people need a little bit larger association they can find that. And that's important; that's not unimportant. That's significant. That's a legitimate purpose for Sunday school. Then we ought to have different kinds of classes, and we ought to call them, you know, Grace Church Discovery Center classes, or seminary classes, or whatever. And people pay anywhere from 25 to 75 dollars for them every quarter. And we tried all kinds of things like this. For example, we would have them up to 12 weeks on Sunday during the Sunday school hour. Sometimes, we'd have them on a weekend like this. Sometimes we had them every Saturday from 9:00 until noon for a month. Sometimes every Thursday night from 7:30-9:00 for 6 weeks. We mixed it up. But what these courses did was, you paid money to take them, there were good teachers that taught the class, and then we developed a curriculum. That people could get training and Pauline theology, Christianity and science.

Let me tell you a story. I did this with 25 scientists in our church for 8 months. We went through some unbelievably rigorous stuff. By the end of this time, we went up to the front of the church and we set aside, we came up with all their names, and phone numbers, and addresses, and we presented these people on a Sunday morning. The elders laid hands on all of them. And we presented them to the entire church as the people that the body looked to for help in creation, and evolution, and science religion. And if your high school or junior high child was having troubles, you'd call one of these people. They were the designated hitters. Now what this did, was this saved one couple's marriage, by studying philosophy of science. Let me tell you how. This couple were university professors. Both of them. No one had ever, in all of their church involvement, showed them that what they did for a living could have anything to do with
Christianity. And so they were becoming kind of frustrated and torn between their Christian commitment and their work. And they were fragmented. I came along and said your vocation is not a penalty. It is a golden opportunity. Let me equip you to use your vocation for the cause of Christ. They began to realize that they could serve Christ from what they did as geologists, or whatever. You know what happened? They realized we've got a role to play, our spiritual lives are a little bit bankrupt, and our marriage isn't what it ought to be; we better get our act together because we've got a responsibility Lord Jesus to have a ministry. I'll tell you it was unbelievable what happened. Same thing with psychologists. We trained about 20 to 25 lay-counselors or for a year. We brought in some PhDs in psychology, they were Christians. We paid for it. So that's where you spend your money for training and equipping. We paid for this. We had courses, they had textbooks. They learned to give psychological tests. And we set these people aside to be the lay-counselors in the church. And we brought them seminar teaching, books to read. It was, It was so, so exciting. People began to have ownership on this. You charge, for these classes, you build the library with some of the money, you pay for outside speakers to come, in et cetera. Are you tracking with me on this?

Now, by mobilizing the church, then, I am not talking about let's go out and picket abortion clinics. That's fine. I'm not against that. I'm not saying let's start becoming activists. That's fine. We need to do that. I am saying though, that if it was the church, if it was the church's withdrawal from culture that tended to create this cultural vacuum, we've got to find some ways to get back out there. And I think we were so far gone, that we've got to regroup. We've got to draw back and regroup, and start working on our own house for a few years. We've got to take it church by church, and start restructuring our local churches, and we've got to start making this distinction. We need to take more seriously that the Church exists to equip the saints
to do the work of ministry. That really is in the Bible. And we've got to start evaluating what we're doing in light of its effectiveness in accomplishing that task.

Couple that with the church, as an intellectual center of ideas, and we need to start talking that way. May I suggest that we start talking about Christian intellectuals, and not avoid that? I regularly go into churches and I'll say list for me on a piece of paper, a group of 5 Christian leaders in the country. Now list for me the character traits that a Christian leader ought to have, that a godly Christian leader ought to have. And then I say list for me the top 5 Christian intellectuals in the country. Well, on the first list most of the top Christian leaders are powerful public communicators. On the list of what does a mature Christian leader have to have, I have yet to find one person that listed--you know maybe somebody didn't tell me--but I've yet to find one person that said they need to be a rigorous intellectual thinker, that is at home in the world of ideas. That knows how to love God with his or her mind. When I talk about Christian intellectuals most people really don't know of anybody, but they say things like well C.S. Lewis, and I remind them he's dead now. How Francis Schaefer is doing, they ask, well. There's good and bad news. You know his books are still selling, but he's not. His ministries have been around for a while. There's his public.

Well, you know, I say to people "do you know the name of the probably, arguably, the top Christian intellectual of 20th century?" That's arguably the top Christian intellectual the 20th century. That may be the top Christian philosopher of the 20th century. Now stop for just a second, before you try to answer it; I don't want to make you feel bad. If we were to talk about who are some of the top Christian athletes, or the top Christian singing groups, or the top Christian public speakers, okay? Do you understand that your values are expressed by the role models that you allow to be shown before the body, do you understand that? Now, if we don't
know our Christian intellectuals, and who they are and what they're doing, doesn't that tell us that they are not really being allowed to be healthy role models alongside the others for young people? So we need to get with it. His name is Alvin Plantinga. You can say Richard Swinburne, I wouldn't fuss with you. He's a good man, but he's not an American. But Alvin Plantinga, Alvin Plantinga, head of the philosophy department at Notre Dame. He's one of the top Christian intellectuals of the 20th century; he's done more good for us than you could possibly imagine. He's just done an unbelievable amount of good for us.

Now, in summary then, I am suggesting that as you go back to your local church, or your campus group, if you're in a campus group some of these things can apply. You need to try to meet regularly, to allow there to be discussions of key books and ideas as a part of your group. You college students: if you're having trouble with your homework and trying to do that at the same time, which I understand, then maybe one of the things you should try to do during the summer is to be sure that whatever else you do, you're meeting with other Christians regularly to read a couple of key, fairly difficult books, that are maybe a little beyond you, that you want to exercise your mind and grow in. And that's what you're going to do over the summer, among other things. But now, mobilizing the church, in summary, requires us to go back and to start saying to ourselves: what are these? What are we doing here that we are just doing because this is the way it seems like it's been done for the last 75 years? And do we need to change some of this, to be sure that we're doing this, to be sure that we're getting back into the culture in an articulate, healthy, non-defensive way. This is not a quick fix. This is going to take a long time, and if Christ comes back soon—which I hope He does, and He may very well--then at least He'll see that we gave it our best shot.

Now let's have a little time for question and answer. Yes, here and then back there. Yes.
Speaker 2:

Say that you're attending a church that has been around for more than a century, and that you're trying to move to a collaborative leadership from a strong-seated pastor position, you would have a, you would have a lot of delegated ranks. How would you even begin to present this?

J.P. Moreland:

Okay, the first thing you've got to do: How do you present this if you've got a strong senior pastor situation? I think the first thing you do is to be extra careful to be gracious, and not to have any tinge of being: "I'm going to show you a thing or two, man are you wrong." Because you know, we don't need that. So I would try to get a discussion going with them, if you'd be open. Write a position paper; that may be hard, but try to get some books on what a church is in the library. Write a paper on it and submit it to see if you'd be willing to read it to talk about it.

Speaker 2:

While I would be concerned with some churches taking up issue with that part of it, I am more concerned with the congregation itself.

J.P. Moreland:

Right. Well, but of course the leaders have got to lead, and it's up to--it's the job of those whom God has called to be leaders, that they begin to educate the body about these matters. In the back, yes ma'am.
Speaker 3:

Can you give us the names of maybe 4 or 5 top Christian thinkers?

J.P. Moreland:

Well that's a good question. Top four or five Christian thinkers. That's a difficult thing because there they exist in different fields. For example, in the field of law I'd say Philip Johnson at UC Berkeley is a top Christian thinker.

Speaker 3:

What was the name of the man you mentioned earlier?

J.P. Moreland:

Alvin Plantinga. P L A N T I N G A. You notice anything interesting about his name? He's a Presbyterian, reformed. And that was the main branch of the church I told you about last night that didn't belly up to the anti-intellectualism. That's why some of the top Christian thinkers today have names like Waltersdorf. Wierenga. Huskemaw. Plantinga. You can't spell any of them, but they're great guys. Now, somebody I haven't had a chance to talk to you. Yeah.

Speaker 4:

I have a question. If you have a church where you have a passionate staff that is extremely resistant to this kind of situation, and you have a staff that is saying "oh, no, no, this is not necessary." How would you go about this without getting yourself thrown out of a church?
J.P. Moreland:

Well how do you go about it? I don't know. You know, it's just like anything, you have to just try to keep sharing, do the best you can to get a discussion going. Why not have a Sunday school class where you talk about ecclesiology, the doctrine of the church. Something like that. I don't have any, other than just do the best you can. These people love Christ, I'll bet you a lot of them will be open to this. Yeah here, and then then here.

Speaker 5:

You see these seeker sensitive to types of services, not alone, but in conjunction with other services that are both weird and growth focused as enabling the mindset, personal minds, personal, you know "what's in it for me."

J.P. Moreland:

Yes. I want to be careful here, because to me, I think church growth in general and the seeker sensitive church approach, is extremely dangerous. But I think it's got some positive things. Now, who could be against wanting to pay careful attention to sociology and to studies about demographics, and being sensitive to the size of the parking lot, and things like that? Who could be against wanting to have services that are different, and that encourage people to come aren't comfortable in a church? That, I'm for that. I think the best thing to do there, is to have it at the Holiday Inn or something. I debated an atheist in a church and we opened it up. We had a signup sheet for four weeks after the debate. Anybody who wanted to come on Sunday morning could come and I would discuss the truth of Christianity for four weeks with anybody you
wanted to come. I was one of the elders of the church and I just didn't go to church for a month. Instead, I went over to the Hilton and we had a room reserved with donuts and coffee catered. And I would host this. We had 25-30 people came, and I just had a little thing there for them, coffee and donuts, and 5 or 6 people came to Christ as a result of it, but I don't mind having it in the church. You know and that's okay, that's fine. But my problem with it is that seeker sensitive churches are really, the tragedy is, that there is a tendency to start communicating the wrong thing about what Christianity is. And the idea is that God exists to make you okay, and religion's primary function is to meet your needs. And I don't know, I'm a little leery of that. And I've got some inside scoop on this, and I just think we have to be careful that's all. Yes.

Speaker 6:

What would be your view on women, if we all have the ability to teach, and we're all called teachers of the gifts that we have, what about women who are willing to preach and men who are not? I mean--

J.P. Moreland:

Yes, yes, yes, yes. What about women? I'm not an expert on this question, I tend to be more traditional, in the sense that I guess my view is--though I can't defend it, I've not given enough time to it--but I have people that are new testament thinkers that tell me that they think this is the most reasonable view. Namely, that God has given men the role of being a pastor, teacher, elders in the church. Having said that, suppose you agree with me, just for the sake of argument, then what this does is this allows, this allows, plenty of room for women to exercise, in my view teaching ministries. I have no problem at all with women teaching from the pulpit,
for example, provided that they're under the authority of the elders of the church. So, and of course from there on: fair game. Sunday school is not biblical, right? There's no such--right? I mean that's a para-church ministry in the church. There's nothing in the Bible about Sunday school. So far as I can tell, fair game, anybody can teach if they want to, as far as I can see. I have no problem with women doing anything they want in that; teaching anything they want. Well, you know. Let's have one or two more, yeah.

Speaker 7:

People who are interested in instituting change process; there's a classic little book that was written in the 70's by Lyle Schaller called The Change Agent, published by Abingdon that provides some very, very helpful ideas.

J.P. Moreland:

Yes, yes, very good. Lyle, spell Schaller.

Speaker 7:

S C H A L L E R. The Change Agent.

J.P. Moreland:


Speaker 8:

Oh no, please, finish what you were going to say.
J.P. Moreland:

No, you go ahead.

Speaker 8:

Now, some would say that there's support for leadership in scripture in that there's always got to be authority at the top, like in James I think they mention--

J.P. Moreland:

All right. The idea here is that this kind of idea goes against the idea of there being a single authority at the top. Well let me let me be cautious about this. That's not really true. James was one of the leaders of the church. But you'll notice that before anybody could exercise leadership, they had to check it out with all the Apostles. And that's why when Paul, before he went on his own, went to Jerusalem to meet with the others because he knew that he needed to check in with the other leaders in the community. Now, James did rise to the top in the sense that they were still operating under what you might call a synagogue model. So whether it was a church or a synagogue is real hard to see there. And in the Old Testament there were certain theocratic mediators that were single authorities, like Moses. But you'll notice that after you get certain theocratic mediators that solely stand between the people and God, that leaves and the offices of Israel--prophet, priest, and king--become diffused and separated. You'll notice that. And so there was, there was more of a one man leadership in certain periods in Israel's history. But I think that it even devised, it even separated in Israel's history. When the New Testament comes around, there really is more of a communitarian idea in leadership than the James
situation indicates, because there was a plurality of apostles and James had to check in. And in the Jerusalem Council, you'll notice, James may have been speaking, but he had no more authority than anyone else. There was there was a council, and everybody had the right to say their piece on the council. And so, I would say that that's really the pattern. And by the way, may I say, I'm not kidding you on this. In the New Testament, it does say that Jesus Christ is the head of the church. And you know, we've got to ask ourselves: how does that look structurally? We've got to find forms that that augment His leadership in the church, and I suggest that the best way to do that is plurality. One more, and then we'll take a break. Way, way in the back. You. Yeah. You've been going, you're going wild over there.

Speaker 9:

Now I have a question. We've been talking about distinctions within the local church, but I think we need to address a place right here where we're standing, and it's called Biola, I think, which used to stand for the Bible Institute of Los Angeles, and I'd feel a lot more comfortable if we weren't sitting in a glorified [unintelligible] of 800 dollars an hour, claiming to be Christian, and it gets more and more secular every day. So I just have a question of: how a bible school, [unintelligible] claims the Bible, talks about things like not being on top of the ivory tower. Do you see the irony in [unintelligible]. So I would like you to address that.

J.P. Moreland:

Well I think you've got an attitude problem. Tell you the truth.

Speaker 9:
J.P. Moreland:

Well, no, no. But for you to say to me, as a professor at this institution, for you to say to me "what is it like to teach in an institution that's going liberal every day?" That's not. That's not the sort of thing that you say to a brother in public. Now, if you want to talk to me about that let's talk about it one on one, okay? But I don't want to discuss this in front of a bunch of people because I'll tell you right now we're not going liberal, Biola university is fully committed to the inerrancy of the Bible, but we happen to think that people need to have an understanding of a broad educational background if they're going to function for the cause of Christ. Terms of the, in terms of the tuition here, part of the reason that tuition is so high, if you want to know the truth, is because the body of Christ has been anti-intellectual so long that they won't give to higher education. You try to raise money, as I have, to do to support our institutions of higher learning; people will not give to it because they're suspicious of education. What they'll give to or missionaries to go to other cultures but they won't give to support it. So you go to USC or UCLA, their alumni give all kinds of money, so that as a result of that--if I was a doctoral student at UCLA, you know what they paid me? They paid me 10,000 dollars a year to study there. We get graduate students who come here, we can't pay them anything. And so a graduate student here, compared to UCLA or USC, has got to spend extra time working just to stay even with the atheist counterparts in secular schools. And that puts them behind. We need to be providing money so that when people come to devote themselves to the cause of Christ they're getting the financial help that allows them to not have to work as much; to devote themselves to their study while we're here. So tuition goes up. One reason tuition goes up is because the body
of Christ, quite frankly, doesn't have the picture that part of its giving ought to be toward education. You go to churches regularly and ask how much of your church budget do you give to support Christian intellectual scholarship? And you ask the average believer, and please, I'm not trying to put you down, but just ask the average Christian: how much of your money, the giving you give to the cause of Christ, goes to supporting Christian intellectual activity? And it's probably not much. And so, until that is remedied, I want to eat. I am paid 18,000 dollars less than my counterparts at regular universities in the state of California. I took a huge pay cut to come here, but I have a right for my kids to eat like anybody else. And we've got to keep the place going. We're 15 million in the hole here, in terms of maintenance. The school gym's roof leaks, and we had a game against Westmont last year, and Clyde Cook was praying that it wouldn't rain because there would have been water all over the gym floor, because we have had to defer maintenance for 15 years, because we don't have the money. So really, it's not like we're a bunch of fat white cats in the suburbs getting rich, I can assure you of that. And I just; those kinds of questions, I don't know. I just don't, I don't know how appropriate they are. If you have something you'd like to launch at me like that, I think it's a little better to do one on one.

Speaker 9:

You're [unintelligible]

J.P. Moreland:

Let's take a break, and we'll come back in 15 minutes.

[Applause]