

# Chalk Talk

## State of the Church

Selected Texts

Written By

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**W**hen I played football in High School my freshman year, we, as players, could always anticipate what would occur in the locker room during half-time. The coach typically rolled out a dusty, green chalk board to the front of the room. We'd all take a knee, or find a bench, and with helmets in hand we'd listen intently the Coach Maroni drew on the board. Each "x" and "o" represented players of the opposing teams, and all of his lines and arrows demonstrated what we should individually be doing to either make our offense effective, or make sure our defense did its job. Believe me, during that short time, the coach gave us a fair, balanced, insightful, and usually passionate appraisal of our play to that point in the game. When the session ended, he pumped us up and sent us back out onto the field to play to win.

Today for this annual State of the Church address think of me as Coach Maroni, you are the team, it's half-time, and we need to have a proverbial chalk talk to make sure we know how the game is going so far so we, in turn, are equipped and motivated to continue our winning streak against the Devil's team. So, let's get at it team. What's our chant? BCC, BCC, BCC, BCC . . . Feel pumped up yet? Good. Now while the adrenaline is pumping in your veins, let's make an honest appraisal of the game so far.

Allow me to pose and answer several questions which can help us be the best possible team for our owner, Jesus Christ. Some of the answers will be short, while others will be a little longer, but they are all important.

### Question #1: How's Our Giving?

No, I'm not talking about your sacrifice and devotion to the team at this juncture. That's a given. I see the time you give to the team. I see many of you here working behind the scenes. I watch as older players mentor younger players, giving them a chance to play and teaching them how to play better. I'm proud of you as your Coach. You collectively have taken Paul's words to the Corinthians to heart and have made them how you play:

<sup>24</sup> Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but *only* one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win. (1 Cor. 9)

We don't have a team of slackers. We do have a team of players who give their time and talents to the team to make sure we win this spiritual game of all games. So, I thank you for playing hard like Paul.

What I am talking about is how you give of your treasures to support the team. This is what makes our team unusual. You are not only players, you are financial supporters, and this last year I must say your support crushed all former records. With a team budget of \$5,535,917, your sacrificial, selfless, and magnanimous giving enabled us to meet and exceed our budget with a figure of \$5,669,975. That's a difference of \$134,058 which places us in the black. This is amazing because a virus really made play and participation tough this year. Your giving allowed us to expand the size of the staff which helps run the team, and it permitted us to do more things to minister for people on our team and to touch lives of people outside our team. So thank you.

Your play in this area for 2021 illustrated what coach Paul taught coach Timothy about what is important for effective team players:

<sup>17</sup> Instruct those who are rich in this present world not to be conceited or to fix their hope on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly supplies us with all things to enjoy. <sup>18</sup> *Instruct them* to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, (1 Tim. 6).

Your play did, in fact, focus on God, on eternal things, on doing good works to care for others, and you followed all this up with a spirit of generosity in your giving. The record, jaw-dropping giving from November to December I wrote to you about a few weeks ago is a living example of your generous spirit toward the work of the team. So, thank you, again, for putting the Owner's team first, as He said we should when He walked among us (<sup>33</sup> *"But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added to you,"* Matt. 6).

Since we are averaging around forty new prospective team members each Sunday, and we actually gained 85 new players last year, I, as the Coach must challenge you to experience the blessings of the Owner, God, as you, too, learn how He magnanimously blesses those who give abundantly. Coach Paul talked about this to one of our ancient teams in Corinth, *"He who sows sparingly shall also reap sparingly; and he who sows bountifully shall also reap bountifully,"* 1 Cor. 9:6).

Also, with a new demanding spiritual season before us, we have a new budget which is 19% higher than last years. Our new budget is \$6,604.350, but it is well within reach given the level of commitment we have from our amazing team. Currently, we are running slightly behind our budget need level, but with the omicron virus variant taking out many of our team members at the beginning of the year, coupled with a game which was negatively impacted by a snow storm, I know it will not be long until your generosity matches our need.

In any event, I just want to say again, thank you. Thank you for knowing the value of sacrifice and generosity to the work and calling of our team owner, God. We have some big important games on the horizon, and your giving will position us to secure some major wins in the win category.

## Question #2: What Our Core Commitment?

I know. We are committed to the Owner, the Lord God, above all things (<sup>47</sup> *And He said to him, You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.* (Matt. 22). You

see that in how many are in worship on a given game day, how many are in our burgeoning Men's and Women's ministry, how many are packing out adult Sunday School classes each week (there is standing room only, by the way), how many students are involved in our Junior and Senior High program, how many children are studying about Him on Sunday mornings, and so forth. We are also committed to our neighbors per His command (Matt. 22:39). You see this in how our benevolence monies are used to alleviate human suffering and needs, in how much is given to the poor through Christmas boxes, in how much is given in baby bottles to support local pregnancy centers, in how our Counseling and Care center is brimming with people, needs, and opportunities.

As I study the tactics of our crafty, highly skilled opponents, I must say we really need to stay committed to the concept of truth until the game is called in the fourth quarter. Truth, be it spiritual/religious, moral, scientific, mathematic, and so forth is under relentless attack. Carl Henry correctly states:

Few times in history has revealed religion been forced to contend with such serious problems of truth and word, and never in the past have the role of words and the nature of truth been as misty and undefined as now. Only if we recognize that the truth of truth . . . is today in doubt, and that this uncertainty stifles the word as a carrier of God's truth and moral judgment, do we fathom the depth of the present crisis. When truth and word remain as the accepted universe of discourse, then all aberrations can be challenged in the name of truth. Today, however, the nature of truth and even the role words is in dispute.<sup>1</sup>

Although his wise words were spoken forty-six years ago, they were prescient for they describe our current game to a tee. In this game we've quickly learned there is no absolute truth, but truths, that truth doesn't have to correspond to the facts it just has to cohere to what various passionate groups think truth is . . . even if their views of what constitutes truth are contradictory, that something is true if I think it is true, that loud, pugnacious rhetoric is a viable method for establishing truth as opposed to using reason, that we all just have our opinions about whatever and that is quite sufficient, and that there are no universal concepts of right and wrong, hence there are supposedly no such things as appropriate and inappropriate judgments, and there certainly is no reasonable or rational way to make sound moral decisions in every situation. Everyone is simply left to do what is right in their own eyes, as was the case in the utterly chaotic period of the Judges (<sup>25</sup>*In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes* (Jdg. 21).

This watered down view of truth has impacted everything from sexuality to doctrine. Every year, Ligonier Ministries produces *The State of Theology* report. When it comes to the concept of truth, 54% of American's believe truth is relative, not absolute. The percentage from the year before was a whopping 60%, so this is somewhat of a win, which is probably due to the cultural chaos we find ourselves in because we have, by and large, embraced the false, tenuous view of truth. But there is still much work to be done, as a relativistic view of truth continues to eat away at everything from what our children should learn about our country's history to how we should view sex and gender.

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<sup>1</sup> Carl F. H. Henry, *God, Revelation, and Authority* (Waco, Texas: Word, 1976), 1:24.

Our culture's twisted view of truth has filtered down into churches, causing many to become woke in areas of doctrine the culture finds problematic to peace and tranquility. Thus, 46% of Christians agree that everyone sins a little, but most people are basically good by nature, 42% believe God accepts the worship of all religions, including Christian, Judaism, and Islam, 22% believe gender is a matter of personal choice despite DNA evidence. With no cultural allegiance to absolute truth, and with churches failing to uphold the concept of truth, the game is not going to get easier, but, at least, we know what we need to focus on: truth, especially spiritual and moral truth.

Writing around 681 B.C. to a nation on the brink of divine discipline for their love affair with sin (Isa. 5), Isaiah bellowed:

<sup>12</sup> For our transgressions are multiplied before Thee, and our sins testify against us; for our transgressions are with us, and we know our iniquities: <sup>13</sup> Transgressing and denying the LORD, and turning away from our God, speaking oppression and revolt, conceiving *in* and uttering from the heart lying words. <sup>14</sup> And justice is turned back, and righteousness stands far away; for truth has stumbled in the street, and uprightness cannot enter. <sup>15</sup> Yes, truth is lacking; and he who turns aside from evil makes himself a prey. Now the LORD saw, and it was displeasing in His sight that there was no justice (Isa. 59).

Sounds like our day, does it not? Isaiah knew what he was talking about. For sixty years he bravely spoke truth to those who were afraid to, but in the end they canceled him under the wicked and ruthless reign of King Manasseh. The fear of canceling, however, did not deter him for he represented and spoke up and out for the God of all truth (Psalm 31:5; Jer. 10:10). Wicked people made sure truth stumbled in the street so they could rationalize their sin, and they did go after anyone who dared to turn from evil and embrace righteousness; however, Isaiah bravely and lovingly held their feet to the fire of truth, as great players of God should.

Jeremiah replaced Isaiah some 54 years later in 627 B.C. For forty-one years he, too, spoke truth to the truthless society which was awash in all sorts of sin, moral compromise, and cultural chaos.

<sup>1</sup> Roam to and fro through the streets of Jerusalem, and look now, and take note. And seek in her open squares, if you can find a man, if there is one who does justice, who seeks truth, Then I will pardon her. <sup>2</sup> "And although they say, 'As the LORD lives,' surely they swear falsely." <sup>3</sup> O LORD, do not Thine eyes look for truth? Thou hast smitten them, *but* they did not weaken; thou hast consumed them, but they refused to take correction. They have made their faces harder than rock; They have refused to repent (Jer. 5).

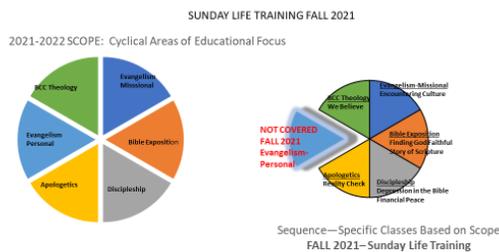
In 54 years of rejecting truth, things had not become better. Far from it. The nation could not have been more mixed up, confused, unrestful, and wicked. God's challenge was clear, "Find me just one person who loves justice and truth and I won't judge." The words here are somewhat hyperbolic because more than one godly person did live in Israel. Jeremiah was one, as was Josiah, Baruch, and Zephaniah. God's point could not have been clearer: It's tough to find a person who really loves justice and who lives for what is true. Why? Because the people did not accept God's

discipline, be what it may, they did not learn from it, choosing rather to harden their hearts against Him and the whole concept of truth. Oh, does this all sound so familiar.

What is most instructive for us as we look at the chalk board is what to zero in on what the Jeremiah says about the Owner in verse 3: *“O LORD, do not Thine eyes look for truth?”* The resounding answer to the question is, “Yes! God constantly looks for that which reflects His character. It’s called truth.” This informs me, as a coach of a local team, I must challenge and equip you to stand up like an Isaiah or a Jeremiah as the nation has a sick, sad, and dangerous love affair with falsity masquerading as truth. Translated, we are and will be committed, as never before, to studying, teaching, defending, and sharing truth. Truth leads to a right relationship with Savior. Truth leads to right living which honors the Savior who made you. Truth holds evil in check, causing it to retreat in defeat. Truth makes people brave so light can overcome the darkness and bring peace.

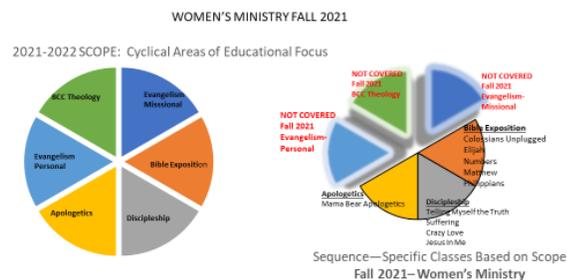
How do we propose upping out game where truth is concerned? Good question. The answer is simple. I will continue to weave how to think about spiritual and moral truth into my sermons and lessons, as will our other pastors, elders, and teachers. This spring I will hold a

special two-day seminar on what constitutes truth and how we can effectively win this battle of truth decay. We have designed, with the assistance of Dr. Derek Murray, a pedagogical Scope and Sequence grid whereby we, as staff, can make sure we are focusing on crucial areas where truth needs to be understood. Here is how this grid plays out in our Women’s



Ministry under the direction of Michele Dillard. As you can see, we will not always hit every key area, but we will be purposeful in what we teach and why we are teaching it. Furthermore, I have devised a detailed talking points document which will be used to train all of our leaders, from pastors to small group leaders, to what key concepts of truth they need to really focus on in 2022 in light of some of our societal issues.

Prophetically, we all know the days, months, and years ahead will be fraught with greater evils as the world rebels against God and prepares themselves for the arrival of the Man of Sin (2 Tim. 3:1-8). We, conversely, must be Isaiah and Jeremiah to our culture so the flame of revival can ignite over the concept of truth. Falsity breeds confusion, destruction, dismay, and spiritual death. Truth breeds peace, construction, tranquility, and spiritual life . . . and hope. We shall be a people, a team, and a church of truth no matter what.



### Question #3: How's Our Team Attitude?

I ask this question because I know what it's like to be on a team which is not doing well at half-time. When it looks like, or feels like, you are losing ground, you can tend to act and talk in a desperate, defensive, and sometimes combative fashion. With truth seemingly on the ropes in our culture, it does get troublesome when you watch the purposeful dismantling of truth with lies, be what they may, doctrinal, moral, or otherwise. All of this, of course, can cause a player to not act like he is on the team to beat all teams.

This is why, then, I offer this word of advice before we head back out onto the field for the second quarter. What is that advice? It comes from Paul who led many successful teams for the Owner in his day. Writing in his playbook at the end of his career, he told a young coach named Timothy what matters while we are on the field battling against the opposing team:

<sup>23</sup> But refuse foolish and ignorant speculations, knowing that they produce quarrels. <sup>24</sup> And the Lord's bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged, <sup>25</sup> with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth, <sup>26</sup> and they may come to their senses *and escape* from the snare of the devil, having been held captive by him to do his will (2 Tim. 2).

Paul is speaking to Timothy how to train players on the owners team, but his words are applicable to how the Owner's players should play against their opponents who love error over truth. We should not get all involved in attempting to answer bizarre, baseless questions, "How many angels can fit on the head of a pin?" Really, it does not matter. The owners players should never have a personal foul called against them because they are arguing with an opponent. On the contrary, players should be able to teach truth, and be really patient when, not if, they take a cheap shot by an opponent. The Owner's players should know they are not out just to win an argument about truth, especially where spiritual truth is concerned. On the contrary, the wise, maturing players know they are out to win a heart for Christ, the owner of the team.

Believe me, I get this drill. I have taken many hits by means of emails which were really uncalled for. It is tough not to fire back a true, but completely flaming email to waylay their tenuous viewpoint. Don't do it. Verse 25 is most instructive in this regard. It tells us our attitude must always be that of gentleness with those who oppose truth. Did you get that? You are to be gentle. Do not yell, curse, stomp your feet, snarl with your teeth like a predatory animal, or employ ab hominem attacks to silence an opponent of truth. No, just be gentle . . . you know . . . like Jesus was on so many occasions. When He was cursed, He blessed. Boy, did He know how to play the game to win.

When show loving, kind, and gentle restraint with lost people impassioned by lies they think are truths, what could occur? They could come to their spiritual senses, see the error of their ways, see for the first time the Devil snared them with his clever trap (be what it may), and get saved. Is this not what Paul did while walking around on Mars Hill in Athens (Acts 17)? Indeed. He built a theological and philosophical bridge to the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers by telling them he knew who their so-called unknown God was. Even though the majority of them mocked him for his lack of learning and academic acumen, he still shared the resurrection story. Before he left the educated people on the hill that day, Scripture tells us,

“<sup>33</sup> So Paul went out of their midst. <sup>34</sup> But some men joined him and believed, among whom also were Dionysius the Areopagite and a woman named Damaris and others with them” (Acts 17).

Attitude, in this scenario, was everything, for Paul’s gentle response to these hostile “professors” resulted in the eternal salvation of a man named Dionysius and a woman named Damaris, plus a few others only the Lord knows in heaven.

So, I challenge you, knowing how tough the times are in which we live. Your attitude, really our attitude, will matter when we are back out there on that field. Sure, you will be tested, pushed, and challenged. Sure, you will feel like saying a few choice words to drive your point of truth home. But do not do it. May gentleness in your delivery be the order of the day. And who knows, just perhaps God will give you two unsuspecting converts of the caliber of Dionysius and Damaris.

### Question #4: How’s Our Team Cohesion?

Put in spiritual terms I’m asking, How is our body life? Is it unified or disunified? For the most part, I believe it is highly unified, with minor areas here and there we need to address disunity. Are we healthy? I believe so because the Word is taught, lives are changed, the culture is impacted locally and universally, prayers are offered up in all sorts of venues, and the Lord continues to add to our numbers.

But body life, or team cohesion, is something we all must work at, constantly. Why? Because we still struggle with sin (Rom. 7), and with truly being filled and controlled by the Spirit of God (Eph. 5:18). How should we go about strengthening our already great and healthy body life? How do we protect it from hits which will come from our Adversary who hates the fact we stand for God’s truth? Strength comes as we make sure we are committed whole hog (as they say down South) to all of the “one another” commands, not suggestions, recorded in the New Testament:

- <sup>10</sup> *Be devoted to one another in brotherly love; give preference to one another in honor; (Rom. 12). Questions: Are you really devoted to other saints? Do you hang out with them, know their needs, and meet their needs?*
- <sup>16</sup> *Be of the same mind toward one another; do not be haughty in mind, but associate with the lowly. Do not be wise in your own estimation. (Rom. 12). Questions: Do you think you are all that and a bag of chips? Is it reflected in how you talk to others? Are you argumentative because you are convinced you are always right? Do you think you are the sharpest person in the room, or do you treat others as equals . . . no matter who they are?*
- <sup>8</sup> *Owe nothing to anyone except to love one another; for he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law (Rom. 13). Questions: Are your words and actions on this team grounded and founded in love? Really? Are your words biting, accusatory, and enflamed at times because others push or bother you?*
- <sup>19</sup> *So then let us pursue the things which make for peace and the building up of one another (Rom. 14). Questions: Wherever you serve in this body, are people in that area built up or blasted by you? Does your presence bring calm or chaos?*

- <sup>7</sup> *Wherefore, accept one another, just as Christ also accepted us to the glory of God (Rom. 15). Question: Do you really accept everyone, or just the people who look like you, relate to you, and so forth?*
- <sup>14</sup> *And concerning you, my brethren, I myself also am convinced that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, and able also to admonish one another (Rom. 15). Questions: Do you so trust other players on this team that when, not if, you don't play effectively or correctly, you can actually take a word of correction from them? A humble person will listen and learn. An arrogant one will react. Which are you, really?*
- <sup>1</sup> *I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, entreat you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, <sup>2</sup> with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing forbearance to one another in love, (Eph. 4). Questions: Are you truly patient with others on this team? Ah, this is tough one because we are all so different, and our moods change quite frequently, we have different life pressures, and our personalities are so different. So I ask you, are you showing patience to team members? I'll never forget the drill we did to make sure we could form up our various teams quickly. The coach would call out, "Kick off unit," and all those guys had to run out into their precise positions. Or he'd yell, "Punt return team" and everyone had to line up. Believe me, there were always a few players who couldn't get their act together. One day we wound up running 75, 75-yard wind sprints for all the times certain players ran out and stood in the wrong positions. I know. It is tough being patient as we "play," but it is what God calls us to show to enhance and strengthen the team. So what about it? Are you patient with others as you serve alongside them? And speaking of serving . . .*
- <sup>13</sup> *For you were called to freedom, brethren; only do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another (Gal. 5). Our body life is quite strong because you do serve each other. Outside this building you serve each other by meeting needs. Inside this building you serve by actually serving to make sure the team can properly function. I commend you for how hard you served in the last year, but now there is a new year before us, so there are new opportunities to strengthen the team.*
  - **Worship Arts Needs**
    - Computer/Slide Operator
    - Video/Camera Operator
    - Light Operator
  - **Care Center Needs**
    - **ESL Teachers/Assistants** - we need volunteers to assist with providing ESL training to people in our community through the Care Center. Prior ESL experience is a plus, but not necessary.
    - **Employment Ministry** - we are looking for volunteers interested in serving as counselors in an employment ministry we are building through the Care Center. Again, we will provide the equipping.
    - **Financial Counselors** -- we are looking for volunteers

- interested in serving as counselors to provide basic financial skills training through the Care Center. We will train people through our existing programs.
- **Go 2020 Conference volunteers** -- we are in need of people to assist with the Go 2020 Missions and Outreach conference May 13 and 14 at BCC.
  - Operations Needs
    - Safety Team (Security and Medical)
    - Shuttle Van Drivers
    - Coffee Team
    - The Nook – Bookstore Volunteers
  - Prayer Ministry Needs
    - Prayer counselors needed: Sunday morning prayer time 4, Tuesday evening 3, daily zoom prayer for men 40-45 per day
  - Women's Ministry Needs
    - Women's Ministry is in need of a Breakaway Coordinator for next Fall.
    - Women needed to Lead our Moms of Hope Support Group and Non Fiction Book Club.
  - Life Group Needs
    - More groups and more leaders. We currently have 45 groups with 700 people.
  - Adults Special Needs
    - Regular adult volunteers (to assist and be friends with participants)
    - Lead teachers
    - Worship leader, someone to teach and lead songs (prefer guitar player, ideally a person who is a music therapist).
    - Training will be provided - ideally a person who is a heart for ministry with adults with disabilities, is kind, patient and loves the Lord.
    - Class would be on Sunday mornings at 10:30.
  - Children's Special Needs
    - Buddies for children with special needs during the 10:30 service on Sundays.
    - Volunteers to help with Respite Night on the last Friday of the month.
  - Children's Ministry Needs
    - Welcome Team Members
    - Preschool Leads & Assistants - both services
    - VBS Decor Coordinators - gift of creativity & organization helpful
  - Student Ministry Needs
    - 3 Female Life Group Leaders for High School (Wed.)
    - 1 Male Life Group Leader for High School (Wed.)

- 2 Female Life Group Leaders for Middle School (Thurs.)

The Scripture calls us, really it commands us as I've noted, to serve each other. As you can see, there are many areas where your spiritual gifts can be used this year to make a major difference on our large, expanding team. So, be in prayer about it, and ask the Lord, "Lord, where would you have me serve on this amazing team?" He will show you and our team will be the better for it when you step forward.

Well, half-time is over, so it's time to get back out onto the field. I know. We could have covered so much more, but I think these are the core concepts which will make the next two quarters ones which will echo in eternity. So, let's get with it as we form a team huddle and chant, BCC, BCC, BCC.