

TREASURING CHRIST TOGETHER: A DENOMINATION CENTERED ON THE SAVIOR

MARK PRATER

My wife Jill and I have been a part of Sovereign Grace for over 30 years now. Our lives have been transformed by the Christ-centered preaching we have heard and the Christ-centered fellowship we have enjoyed. Our small denomination is far from perfect, but there is no place I'd rather be laboring for the gospel.

The story of Sovereign Grace Churches over the past three decades is the story of a joyful, steadfast people who are centered on the Savior. 1 Corinthians 2:2 is the resolve that marks our history and continues to shape our culture: "For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified."

Our churches are defined most deeply by our commitment to treasuring Christ together. This intentional emphasis on the person and work of Jesus Christ has marked our past, shapes the present, and is vital for our future as a denomination.

Building on the Main Thing

God, in his kindness, has continued to mature us over the years, but the

most important things have remained unchanged. I'm so grateful for our founder, C.J. Mahaney, who consistently pointed our family of churches to Christ and him crucified through his leadership and preaching. His preaching, example, writing, and leadership have been foundational in building Sovereign Grace. We treasure Christ more because God has used C.J. to help us grasp the significance and glory of the cross.

C.J.'s preaching also influenced the Christ-exalting songs that have been written and produced by Sovereign Grace Music, which we have been singing in our churches for over 30 years. And I remember life-changing discussions in small group meetings where we discussed C.J.'s book, *Living the Cross Centered Life*. That little book captures his life-message and has taught the pastors and members of Sovereign Grace to keep the gospel the main thing in our daily lives.

*Our mission is a
Christ-centered
mission with a
Christ-exalting
purpose.*

Motivated by God's faithfulness to us in the past, we endeavor to continue building our churches on the gospel. We want to plant and build churches marked by a commitment to Christ and an affection for Christ as we seek to treasure Christ together. We count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus

our Lord (Phil. 3:8).

The world around us defines itself by what it is against. But we want the people who walk into our churches to know what we are for. We are *for* the supremacy of Christ in all of life. We are *for* Jesus being exalted in our homes, our relationships, our workplaces, our communities, and in each of our churches. We are *for* seeking the glory of the Lord, not our own fame, in all that we do. By God's grace, we want to pursue an abiding joy in Christ, overflowing gratitude for Christ, and sacrificial generosity motivated by Christ. These are tangible expressions that we treasure Christ above all.

A Sure and Steadfast Anchor

Staying centered on Christ and his glorious gospel has provided a strong foundation for us. That foundation has proven to be unshakable as we have endured the various trials that God in his good and wise providence has

brought us as a family of churches. As we have navigated the storms, we have become all the more convinced that Christ is the “sure and steadfast anchor of our souls” (Heb. 6:19).

When sin seems to cling so closely, we continue to look “to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith” so that we can run with endurance the race he set before us (Heb. 12:1-2). Because we have faced tribulation, accusation, and distress, we are even more certain that nothing can separate us from the love of God that is ours in Christ Jesus our Lord (Rom. 8:35, 39). When God has used our trials to reveal our many weaknesses, we have been comforted knowing that we have a great high priest, Jesus Christ, who is able to sympathize with our weaknesses (Heb. 4:15). By his shed blood, he has made a way for undeserving sinners to draw near to the throne of grace to receive mercy and grace to help in time of need (Heb. 4:16).

Our churches, along with churches throughout the world in many denominations, are among the evidence that Jesus will build his church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it (Matt. 16:18). Focusing on Christ has made us a resilient family of churches as we have faced many dangers, toils, and snares together.

I don't know what trials may await us in the future. What I do know is that Christ loves his church, and remaining centered on him is the sure foundation we must continue to build upon. This will prepare us for whatever God's good sovereignty brings our way.

Making Christ Known

As we look to the future together, how does a small denomination that got its start in the United States fulfill the Great Commission to make disciples of all nations? By collectively staying centered on Christ, which fuels our commitment to see Jesus Christ known and honored among the nations.

Our goal is not simply to increase the number of churches in Sovereign Grace. Rather, we want to plant churches and partner with other like-minded churches who share our passion for seeing people from every tribe, tongue, and nation know Christ as their Savior and honoring him with their lives.

Our mission is a Christ-centered mission with a Christ-exalting purpose. For the day is coming when we will stand among a great multitude that no

one can number comprised of people from all tribes, peoples, and languages who will gather around the throne and sing, “salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne and to the Lamb” (Rev. 7:9-11).

Until then, Christ’s mission remains in force, calling us to reach the lost with the message of Jesus Christ. But we will only be able to fulfill our mission if we remain centered on the reason for our existence, which is the exaltation of Jesus Christ.

What else would we rather be centered on? Christ alone is a treasure of inestimable worth. Year after year, the churches of Sovereign Grace have tasted and seen that the Lord is good. Christ has saved us, he has brought us together as his people, he has guided and protected us over the decades, he is with us today, and he is the goal of all our future labors.

As a family of churches, we have always been about Christ and him crucified. My prayer is that by God’s grace, we will continue to know nothing except Jesus Christ and him crucified for generations to come so that God alone receives the glory for all that we do together as a denomination.

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