

Babel Part 2: The Tyranny Of Babel

By:

Peter Martin

Sermon Date: May 19th, 2024

Now the whole earth had one language and one speech. And it came to pass, as they journeyed from the east, that they found a plain in the land of Shinar, and they dwelt there. Then they said to one another, "Come, let us make bricks and bake them thoroughly." They had brick for stone, and they had asphalt for mortar. And they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower whose top is in the heavens; let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth." But the LORD came down to see the city and the tower which the sons of men had built. And the LORD said, "Indeed the people are one and they all have one language, and this is what they begin to do; now nothing that they propose to do will be withheld from them.

-Genesis 11:1-6

In the last paper we talked about both the universality of the Tower of Babel, and the motives men have for constructing structures like the Tower of Babel. To briefly recap here, although this passage is talking about a real historical event, it also functions as a symbolic warning for all mankind. All systems bend towards this structure in which, in an attempt to avoid natural entropy and death, a singular system attempts to incorporate all other systems into itself. For example, a singular nation can try to swallow up all other nations or a religious or political system can attempt to consume all other societal institutions into itself. The motive for doing this is understandable and stated in the passage itself.

The men of Babel were resisting being "scattered abroad". Meaning that they were living in a dangerous world after the flood waters had destroyed the society. This history had shown them that all things, no matter how strong and powerful, eventually decay and collapse. They didn't want this to happen, and so they attempted to bridge the material and the divine through their artificial tower. By "reaching the heavens" in their own power, they believed that they could prevent these normal processes and continue forever in security and infinite prosperity.

God however sees this tower as being tyrannical, and in an effort to stop the totalizing authoritarianism that was descending from that tower, He confuses the languages and disperses Babel. Since the tower of Babel is something that human beings naturally want to construct, it would be good for us to explore why the necessary outcome of this

structure is tyrannical. By doing this, hopefully we can avoid the natural temptation to elevate our own tower of Babel, and to also see how the church is meant to withstand the modern towers of Babel.

High Places

“then you shall drive out all the inhabitants of the land from before you, destroy all their engraved stones, destroy all their molded images, and demolish all their high places;”

-Numbers 33:51

The first interesting thing to notice about Babel is that it centered around a tower, or “high place”, that reached into the heavens. This theme of “high places” is one that occurs repeatedly throughout the Bible. What this symbolized for ancient man, was a type of ladder that reached into the heavens and allowed for their elite to ascend into the heavens and bring down divine knowledge. Because of this, all human societies use this image of the “high place” to represent locations of power.

The heart of man seems to subconsciously build towers in order to elevate the centers of power that they most venerate. That is why within the ruins of ancient cultures, we usually see these high places represented in religious structures. In Egypt this would be the pyramids, but in most other places, these would be temples to various gods built on top of mountains. These structures were raised higher than surrounding buildings to convey hierarchy and authority.

While high places aren't innately bad, after all, God has His temple built on a mountain as well, the elevation of anything above God within a culture tends to corrupt the souls of the men who ascend these structures. I think that G.K. Chesterton explains this problem really well in his mystery novel “The Innocence of Father Brown” when his titular character talks about the danger of high places.

“I think there is something rather dangerous about standing on these high places even to pray,” said Father Brown. “Heights were made to be looked at, not to be looked from.”

“Do you mean that one may fall over,” asked Wilfred.

“I mean that one's soul may fall if one's body doesn't,” said the other priest.

“I scarcely understand you,” remarked Bohun indistinctly.

“Look at that blacksmith, for instance,” went on Father Brown calmly; “a good man, but not a Christian--hard, imperious, unforgiving. Well, his Scotch religion was made up by men who prayed on hills and high crags, and learnt to look down on the world more than to look up at heaven. Humility is the mother of giants. One sees great things from the valley; only small things from the peak.”

-GK Chesterton: The Innocence Of Father Brown

In other words, when men stand up on high places, it tends to elevate their conceptions of themselves and therefore to create pride and arrogance within them. It is from these heights that men stop looking up at the greater good that is in God, and only look down at others. To further the problem, mankind seems to be greatly tempted to elevate leaders to these high places that we might venerate them. This however further elevates the pride of the leader and turns them more oppressive and tyrannical.

Nimrod

“Cush begot Nimrod; he began to be a mighty one on the earth. He was a mighty hunter before the LORD; therefore it is said, “Like Nimrod the mighty hunter before the LORD.” And the beginning of his kingdom was Babel, Erech, Accad, and Calneh, in the land of Shinar.”

-Genesis 10:8-10

We are told that Nimrod was the founder of Babel, and that he was a “mighty one on the earth.” His might and competency as a hunter elevated him in the eyes of men who desired to make him into their king. This means that the tower of Babel was not just a manifestation of power, but, like the ancient pyramids or ziggurats, it was also a means by which Nimrod could “ascend” into the heavens and rule over his people. This was quite common in the ancient world, where societies saw their kings as “incarnations” of their highest gods. This meant that the ancient king was also the high priest who exercised total rule over the social and religious centers of his given society. It seems that our hearts are so insistent on looking up to individuals that we forget that they will end up looking down on us.

“Power tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely. Great men are almost always bad men, even when they exercise influence and not authority: still more when you superadd the tendency or the certainty of corruption by authority. There is no worse heresy than that the office sanctifies the holder of it.”

-Lord Acton - “Acton - Creighton Correspondence”

The interesting thing about this well known quote, is that Lord Acton is actually suggesting that power has a tendency to corrupt the soul. He is not saying that bad men ascend to power and then use it in oppressive ways, (though he isn't denying that fact), he is saying that power itself can corrupt even a good man. As people “ascend” these towers, they are distanced from their people. They become disconnected from the experiences of their people, and they also become disconnected from the means of

production within their society. This lifts up their pride and moves them to become more tyrannical.

Elites and the People

The symbol of the tower is a representation of the great distance between the elites of a society and the common people. The higher up the elites climb, the less they are able to relate to those who they rule over. Because they don't understand the concerns of those underneath them, they tend to think of the needs of the people as being petty and beneath their notice. They might even begin to see the needs of the people as being a nuisance to them. Think for a second about Moses and Mount Sinai.

In the book of Exodus, the people of Israel witness the presence of God manifesting on top of Mount Sinai as He speaks audibly to them. This event is too terrifying for them, and so they have Moses ascend the mountain and mediate divine commandments to them. The interesting thing about this story is that God desired to speak directly to the people of Israel, but they instead desired for Moses to bring the Word of God down to them. In pagan stories, the opposite is the truth.

The gods of the pagans are brutal and indifferent figures. They have no desire for direct relationships with their people, and instead only want the elites to mediate between them and the common people. That is why all pagan cultures have these powerful hierarchical structures in which the elites rule from on high. But our God, because He knows the heart of man, did not want this structure for His people, even though they constantly resist Him by elevating Moses, then Aaron, the judges, and finally in demanding a king from God in the book of 1st Samuel. And unfortunately we see throughout the Old Testament that even the best kings of Israel become corrupted by their power.

Let's look at Moses again as an example. Even though Moses was a good man, in fact he was called the most humble man in the world (Numbers 12:3), he was corrupted by his power and was kept from entering the promised land as a result. The event that did this was when the people of Israel demanded water in Numbers 20. To be fair to Moses this event was preceded by numerous rebellions by the people of Israel against God and Moses, but even so, Moses allowed his power to go to his head and became frustrated with the people for demanding water. Even though God told Moses to speak to a rock in order to bring forth water, Moses, moved by frustration with the people, calls them rebels and strikes the rock. To this God replies:

“Because you did not believe me, to hallow Me in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this assembly into the land which I have given them.”

-Numbers 20:12

Moses failed to “hallow”, or to properly venerate, God before the people. He became caught up with his own authority and struck the rock out of frustration with the people instead of submitting to the heart of God and requesting water from the rock. If even a man as good as Moses can fall to this temptation, we must recognize this temptation for all men who hold power over others. Unfortunately men don't tend to pay attention to this message and instead continuously lift up “heroes” to save them from their problems. Even in the church we have elevated popes and saints in order to give us stability, and in the modern Protestant church, we have elevated teaching pastors. This is why we keep hearing stories of pastors like Mark Driscoll who abused their authority over the people that they were supposed to be shepherding.

The people in the congregation elevate these leaders because of their teaching gifts. And as they are elevated, they cease to function as shepherds for the needs of the individuals within their churches. They instead become quasi celebrities who distance themselves from the affairs of their people to focus on teaching. By doing this, they fall to the same temptation of Moses, David, Solomon, and many others.

The Tower and Nature

When the elites lived in their ancient palaces and castles, they had servants bring them all their food, raise their kids, and take care of all their needs. They weren't subject to the forces of nature. They had palaces in different parts of their empire for every season to avoid unpleasant weather. As they became more distant from nature though, this also had an effect on their pride. Because they weren't subject to the power of nature, they began to think of themselves as being above nature.

When someone lives off of the land, having to plant their own food, slaughter their own animals, and raise their own children, it has a humbling effect. Doing these common things teaches us how powerless we really are and this can create a humble and thankful heart. Anyone who has tried to do simple things that used to be ubiquitous for our ancestors like making their own clothes, building their own furniture, growing their own food, raising their own livestock, etc., will understand just how difficult these simple things are. When you do this, you begin to appreciate what you have. But when you become accustomed to buying everything you live off of from the store, you can feel entitled to these things and have low regard for those who worked to provide these amenities for you. It is no mistake that the more urban an area gets, the more secular they become, and they also become more condescending to those in rural areas that actually provide them with the things that they rely upon.

The structure of the tower is an artificial edifice that separates man from nature. In doing this, man begins to think of himself as above nature and cultivates in him an arrogant heart. This is why modern man can be so oppressive to nature. We don't feel bound by the restrictions of old, we really do believe that we are above such things and this attitude is reflected in many different facets of modern life. I honestly believe that the modern green movement and alarm over climate change is a backlash to our own arrogance. It is man's misguided attempt to venerate nature again. However, since they aren't returning to worship the God of nature, they are slipping into the same mistakes as the pagans before them who worshiped nature, and therefore venerated men who claimed to exercise control over nature.

The Denial of Reality

"Naked I came from my mother's womb, And naked shall I return there. The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; Blessed be the name of the LORD."

-Job 1:21

The opposite of the tower of Babel is the humble heart that acknowledges our place in this world. However, accepting our limitations, the natural cycles of life, and the truth of our existence in the hands of God, are things that the heart of man does not find easy. We want so desperately to believe that we can actually fight fate and even exercise power over nature through our own ingenuity and strength. It is a genuine act of humility and faith to speak as Job does, especially considering that he says this after undergoing intense tragedy and loss. The heart of man resists this truth and tries to artificially create absolute stability in contradiction to nature itself.

This is another reason why the tower of Babel has to be an oppressive structure. In order to create total stability it has to stand opposed to the natural order. Take a family for an example. When parents have a child, the child must go through various phases of development in order to grow to adulthood. But each new stage of development represents a new type of "flood" within the family where the structure of the family has to fundamentally change in order to give the child more autonomy.

However, many parents don't like this change, they don't want to go through new seasons and accept the lessening of their own role and authority within their child's life, so they might try to artificially halt the growth of their child. There are various ways they can do this, like taking them out of school, removing them from friend groups, or simply refusing to give them greater liberty as they grow older. Even though the motive of the parent is simply to keep things the way they are, because their actions resist the natural order, their behavior will be necessarily tyrannical.

The natural order of things is to degrade over time. However, the process of decay allows for renewal and rebirth over time. A parent might lose the relationship with their child in which the child is helpless, but if they allow that part of their relationship to die, they can see that relationship reborn in a different form as they learn to rejoice in their child's growth and maturity.

When this same principle is repeated at the societal level you get the true tyranny of Babel. A particular political group, usually led by a charismatic leader, gains control over the nation by capitalizing on some crisis that they claim to be able to fix. Once they seize power, they must ensure that they never lose power and so they have to forcefully shut down opposing views and claim to speak with absolute authority. By doing this, these leaders begin to channel the spirit of Satan.

Supplanting God

“How you are fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! How you are cut down to the ground, You who weakened the nations! For you have said in your heart: ‘I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God; I will also sit on the mount of the congregation On the farthest sides of the north; I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I will be like the Most High.’ Yet you shall be brought down to Sheol, To the lowest depths of the Pit.”

-Isaiah 14:12-15

In this very interesting passage, the prophet Isaiah is speaking against the king of Babylon. As he describes the heart of this king and his eventual fall, Isaiah compares his heart to that of Satan. The fall of Satan was because God had placed him in an elevated position with surpassing beauty and splendor. This beauty was meant to be enjoyed by Lucifer in his proper role and in submission to the supreme glory of the One who had made him. Instead he allowed his praise to go to his head and in his arrogance, he left his proper estate and sought to supplant God and reign in His place. Beyond the madness to believe that one could actually “defeat” God, the greater madness is to believe that one could become powerful enough or wise enough to reign in the place of God.

The heart of Satan's narcissism is the belief that he could do things better than God. That his judgements could be more just than God, his morality more pure than God's, and his achievements more impressive than God's. Whether through malice or sincere madness, it is this heart that Satan is constantly trying to share with his fellow creatures.

“Then the serpent said to the woman, “You will not surely die. “For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.”

-Genesis 3:4-5

Because our hearts were originally corrupted by this message, we naturally bend towards wanting to seize the authority of God for ourselves. All pagan religions, and all of our philosophical and political systems are attempts to ascend to the place of God and rule the earth in our own strength. But since we are not God, and don't contain even a fraction of the wisdom and power of God, our attempts to exercise supreme dominance over the world have only made things worse. To rebel against God is to rebel against the bedrock of reality itself. When people do this in the name of utopia, they can't help but create Hell instead.

It is our inability to create our perfect world that produces tyranny. At the heart of all narcissists is really an insecurity that is seeking power in order to justify itself. The reason why Satan is depicted in the Bible as being so haughty and boastful, is because he knows deep down that he is not the God whom he seeks to supplant. All tyrants, from the bloodthirsty warlord, to the cut-throat politician, to the petty boss, and even the schoolyard bully all suffer from this same insecurity. They feel their faults and weaknesses, but instead of finding humility, they instead compensate for their lack through oppression and tyranny.

We not only lack the power of God, but also His wisdom. When any person, or group of people try to create the perfect system that unites heaven and earth, they will always lack something in their philosophy and make mistakes. Like cracks in a foundation, these “lacks” will eventually propagate themselves outward and create an unstable and dangerous system. Since the claim of the elites is to provide the absolute stability that only God can give people, they can't admit to their mistakes. Instead they have to lie and pretend that they are speaking infallibly. Many will willingly participate with this deception, even working with those in power to silence others, because they so desperately want to find prosperity and security within this system.

It is because of this truth that God has ordained not only for man to be mortal, but also for our systems to be toppled over time. God isn't “jealous” of our power, but like a father with their unruly children, God must impose limits upon us to save us from ourselves. That is why God confused the languages of Babel. God dispersed man before the tyranny of Babel became all encompassing.

“Then the LORD answered Job out of the whirlwind, and said: “Now prepare yourself like a man; I will question you, and you shall answer Me: “Would you indeed annul My judgment? Would you condemn Me that you may be justified? Have you an arm like God? Or can you thunder with a voice like His? Then adorn yourself with majesty and splendor, And array yourself with glory and beauty. Disperse the rage of your wrath; Look on everyone who is proud, and humble him. Look on everyone who is proud, and bring him low; Tread down the wicked in their place. Hide them in the dust together, Bind their faces in hidden darkness. Then I will also confess to you That your own right hand can save you.”

-Job 40:6-14

It is the call of God for us to repent of this madness and find sanity in submitting supremely to the Creator and the Sustainer of the heavens and the earth. It is only the repentant person who understands this truth and organizes their life in light of it. The humbled person will fight the temptation to form a perfect system free from decay because they know that such things don't exist in this world, they only exist in the world to come. He merely tries to create the most stable world that he can, while acknowledging his own mortality and the need for seasons of change.

“To everything there is a season, A time for every purpose under heaven: A time to be born, And a time to die; A time to plant, And a time to pluck what is planted; A time to kill, And a time to heal; A time to break down, And a time to build up; A time to weep, And a time to laugh; A time to mourn, And a time to dance; A time to cast away stones, And a time to gather stones; A time to embrace, And a time to refrain from embracing; A time to gain, And a time to lose; A time to keep, And a time to throw away; A time to tear, And a time to sew; A time to keep silence, And a time to speak; A time to love, And a time to hate; A time of war, And a time of peace.”

-Ecclesiastes 3:1-8

Modern Babel

In our modern culture, while we have become increasingly secular, we are also trying to construct our own tower to heaven. The person who I believe saw this problem most clearly was C.S. Lewis. He expressed his worries in his philosophical book “The Abolition of Man” and then adapted those themes in his science fiction book “That Hideous Strength”. “That Hideous Strength” derives its name from a 16th century poem by Sir David Lindsay entitled “Ane Dialog”. In this poem, there is a section that describes the tower of Babel, and talks about the massive shadow that was cast by “that hideous strength...” By referencing this poem, Lewis was trying to show that his book was meant to describe the modern “tower of Babel”.

In this book, he sees the danger coming, not from the political world, nor the entertainment world, but instead from the intellectual world, namely, from the universities. Remember that the tower of Babel has to be a consolidation of all institutional power into a singular entity. For most cultures this was the church expanding to swallow up the state, or the state expanding to swallow up the church. But Lewis saw that both the leaders of the church and the state were descending from the same institutions, namely the universities and the so-called “expert class”.

“It is the magician’s bargain: give up our soul, get power in return. But once our souls, that is, ourselves, have been given up, the power thus conferred will not belong to us. We shall in fact be the slaves and puppets of that to which we have given our souls... The real objection is that if man chooses to treat himself as raw material, raw material he will be: not raw material to be manipulated, as he fondly imagined, by himself, but by mere appetite, that is, mere nature, in the person of his de-humanized Conditioners.”

-C. S. Lewis - *“The Abolition of Man”*

What he is saying here, is that since we have turned ourselves into mere material beings in our imaginations, we seek salvation and certainty in our intellectuals, not our spiritual leaders. It is no longer the priest who teaches us how we ought to live, but instead it is the psychologist, the oracles are no longer the ones that predict the fate of the culture, instead it is statisticians, it isn’t the monk who runs the charities that we donate to, instead it is the welfare systems run by bureaucrats, and it isn’t the pastor who teaches us how we might find eternal life, it is the scientist who is promising to extend our life indefinitely.

“Until recently, you would not have heard scientists, or anyone else, speak so bluntly. “Defeat death?! What nonsense! We are only trying to cure cancer, tuberculosis, and Alzheimer’s disease,” they insisted. People avoided the issue of death because the goal seemed too elusive. Why create unreasonable expectations? We’re now at a point, however, where we can be frank about it. The leading project of the Scientific Revolution is to give humankind eternal life. Even if killing death seems a distant goal, we have already achieved things that were inconceivable a few centuries ago.”

-Yuval Harari - *“Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind”*

For Lewis, this new modern tower is the most oppressive one ever constructed by man because at least the pagan towers were constructed towards the heavens. They believed in divine authorities and an everlasting kingdom outside this earth. If modern, materialistic, man is to find heaven, it must be on this earth. And what our elites are

increasingly coming to understand is that the main obstacle to utopia is nature itself. That is why C.S. Lewis wrote in "The Abolition of Man":

"The final stage is come when Man by eugenics, by prenatal conditioning, and by an education and propaganda based on a perfect applied psychology, has obtained full control over himself. human nature will be the last part of nature to surrender to Man. The battle will then be won. We shall have 'taken the thread of life out of the hand of Clotho' and be henceforth free to make our species whatever we wish it to be. The battle will indeed be won. but who, precisely, will have won it?... They are not men at all. Stepping outside the Tao, they have stepped into the void. nor are their subjects necessarily unhappy men. They are not men at all: they are artifacts. Man's final conquest has proved to be the abolition of Man."

-C. S. Lewis - "The Abolition of Man"

When God said of the men of Babel that "nothing that they propose to do will be withheld from them." (Genesis 11:6) He is not saying that triumphally, but in a fearful manner. Since man is corrupt in our soul, absolute power given into our hands is not good, but terrifying. We now live in an age in which the effects of Babel have been reversed. Language is no longer a separating power amongst nations, and as a result, we have seen technological advancements in the last century that dwarf all previous centuries. What Lewis warns of though, is that men begin to cultivate power to heal the ills of man, but then, corrupted by power, they seek to fix man himself. Through the creation of things like nuclear weapons we now face, for the first time in human history, a legitimate threat to our very existence, but even that fear pales in comparison to Lewis' fear that man is now creating means by which we can alter the very nature of humanity. And if our societies keep going in the direction that they have been, even our most wild dystopian fantasies will pale in comparison to what we will actually create in the coming years.

"For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be. "And unless those days were shortened, no flesh would be saved; but for the elect's sake those days will be shortened."

-Matthew 24:21-22

The Role of the Church

To be clear, although I agree with Lewis that the academic world has consolidated much of the power in our culture, it has not yet raised to the level of tyranny that we would expect from a fully formed tower of Babel. But, due to many varied crises in our current time, many, even in the church, are seeking a heroic figure who might "save" us from our troubles. With all this surrounding chaos and uncertainty it is more important than

ever that the church holds fast to its identity before God and acts as a foil to the panic around us that threatens to build a new, and supremely oppressive, tower of Babel.

“They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain, For the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD As the waters cover the sea.”

-Isaiah 11:9

Unlike the tower of Babel that was meant to elevate a man to the position of God, the church is led by God who has come down as a man. That is why Isaiah describes the kingdom of the messiah, not as a tower, but as a mountain. A tower is an artificial construct of man that reaches to heaven and allows only a few to climb to the top. A mountain on the other hand is earth itself raised to heaven, which allows for many to climb up it and even live on it. And unlike Mount Sinai, which only Moses could ascend, when Jesus taught His followers, it is no mistake that He took all of them up on the mountain with Him as a picture of Jesus bringing all who come to Him to God.

“For you have not come to the mountain that may be touched and that burned with fire, and to blackness and darkness and tempest, and the sound of a trumpet and the voice of words, so that those who heard it begged that the word should not be spoken to them anymore. (For they could not endure what was commanded: “And if so much as a beast touches the mountain, it shall be stoned or shot with an arrow.” And so terrifying was the sight that Moses said, “I am exceedingly afraid and trembling.” But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven, to God the Judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect, to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than that of Abel.”

-Hebrews 12:18-24

The church supports a message, not of man reaching God through our efforts, but God reaching man through His. This is a message of humility. Unlike the tower that promises to subject nature to our will, the mountain of God is one that seeks to submit our wills to God's, recognizing that it is only when He returns, that the world will be fixed and death will be no more. But while we await the return of Christ, we are supposed to be faithful stewards of the time we are allotted. We are not to sit idly by and distance ourselves from the political and social issues that surround us.

Finding the right balance for the church in our given society is a little like walking a tightrope between two different extremes. On one hand, we want to be socially conscious enough to be “salt and light” in our current world, but on the other hand we

want to avoid becoming so embroiled in politics that we become consumed by them and lose our peace in the sovereignty of God. We must understand that some men must rule over others, while also remembering that power can corrupt even the best of us. We must prioritize evangelism of the lost, but we also must aggressively oppose social degradation and disorder. We should want the church to be a force for good, standing firm on the right political issues, but we must avoid the church becoming a purely political entity.

These are just a couple of the considerations that the church has to balance in order to fulfill our role within our society. But achieving these balances is incredibly difficult, we usually see instead many churches falling to one extreme or another. As a pastor, I am trying desperately to balance these things in my heart as well as in the way that I am leading the church that I am shepherding, but the more I wrestle with these problems, the more I realize the need for church unity that has been lacking in the west for some time now.

“Coming to Him as to a living stone, rejected indeed by men, but chosen by God and precious, you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.”

-1 Peter 2:4-5

The metaphor that Peter uses here is really interesting. He is saying that the church is formed when “living stones” come together and are built up into a spiritual house. This means that in some way, the church is formed and made more stable by the interaction of believers with each other. Each believer has different strengths and focuses, and these propensities bend us towards differing extremes, some good and some bad. The mistake of Babel is that you have a small group of elites that are reigning over the majority of the people. This creates an echo chamber for them in which they are cut off from differing perspectives that would help balance them out.

The church is supposed to be the opposite of this. That the body of Christ, although it contains differing roles and responsibilities, there is an equality that we enjoy that is in our common faith and salvation through Christ. Understanding this should cause us to seek closer relations with other believers that will help smooth out our rough edges and align us more to the center of these difficult issues.

“But Jesus called them to Himself and said, “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who are great exercise authority over them. “Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant. “And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave—“just as the

Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.”

-Matthew 20:25-28

Hierarchy and authority are actually divine attributes that exist within the structure of the trinity. As such, they are not bad things in themselves. They become bad when we see our power as making us “above” our fellow man. Power structures need not be oppressive, they can actually be good and reflective of God. But they only remain that way when we remember that the purpose of power is to serve others, not our own self interest. We retain that understanding only when those without authority seek to properly respect those with authority and those with power seek to serve those who they rule over, always feeling the weight of responsibility that their power gives them.

At a local level, this can be achieved when Christians come to church in order to be true members of the body (1 Corinthians 12:12-31). So many Christians in the west attend church infrequently and even when they do, they attend it like a ball game or a movie. They stay for the “show” and then they leave. This turns the leadership in the church into more of a celebrity class and also denies the congregants this all important fellowship that would help grow them in their individual faith.

“As iron sharpens iron, So a man sharpens the countenance of his friend.”

-Proverbs 27:17

In order to maintain individual balance and focus on God in these chaotic times, the church must be more than the service. The church has to be the community of believers living their lives together in service to our God. This is why our church focuses so much on building up small groups and creating community events. We have to be careful to not make the opposite mistake though and think that the church doesn't need to have a Sunday service. Sunday service is an important time where the church gathers together to worship God and study His word collectively. But every time the church gathers together, even if it's just a couple members gathering simply to spend time together, it is a meeting of the church that can result in Godly edification.

We must also expand our view outside our local church. When the Nazi party was on the ascendancy in Germany, unfortunately many Christian pastors either supported the Nazi's or at the very least tolerated their rise to power. The ones who didn't saw the need to band together in a common confession of faith and re-establish their role as the church within Germany. They became known as the “Confessing Church” and not only shared resources with one another, which was really helpful when persecution began, but they also shared counsel with one another. They saw something that we should take

note of, and that is the rise of the authoritarian state, corresponded with the growing passivity of the church. The German church had mainly vacated the public square and given over its responsibilities (like public welfare and education) to the state.

This confessional movement was an attempt to re-establish the church in its proper place so that it could interact properly with the state. Some of the pastors were more passive and resisted overt action against the Nazi's, others were more fiery and wanted to oppose them at every opportunity. By banding together they made sure that when they spoke up, it was necessary, it was focused on honoring God, and that their voice had a large power behind it since it represented numerous churches across the country as opposed to one isolated church.

While I believe very strongly in the goodness of the protestant reformation, one issue that has come out of it, has been a strong disunity among the various churches. We tend to see one another as almost competition and not as various manifestations of the same unified body of Christ. If we want to stand strong in these trying times, this must be reversed, and the church has to stand together as much as we can. This is a much larger topic that I am currently thinking through and writing about, but for every individual believer it is important that we prioritize our relationship with God, that we seek to integrate ourselves more fully with our local church, that we pray for our country and the church leaders, that pray for and seek greater church unity, that we seek more ways to reach out to our communities, that we speak out when we must, and that we above all else are eagerly awaiting the return of Christ.

“You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt loses its flavor, how shall it be seasoned? It is then good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men. “You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. “Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.”

-Matthew 5:13-16