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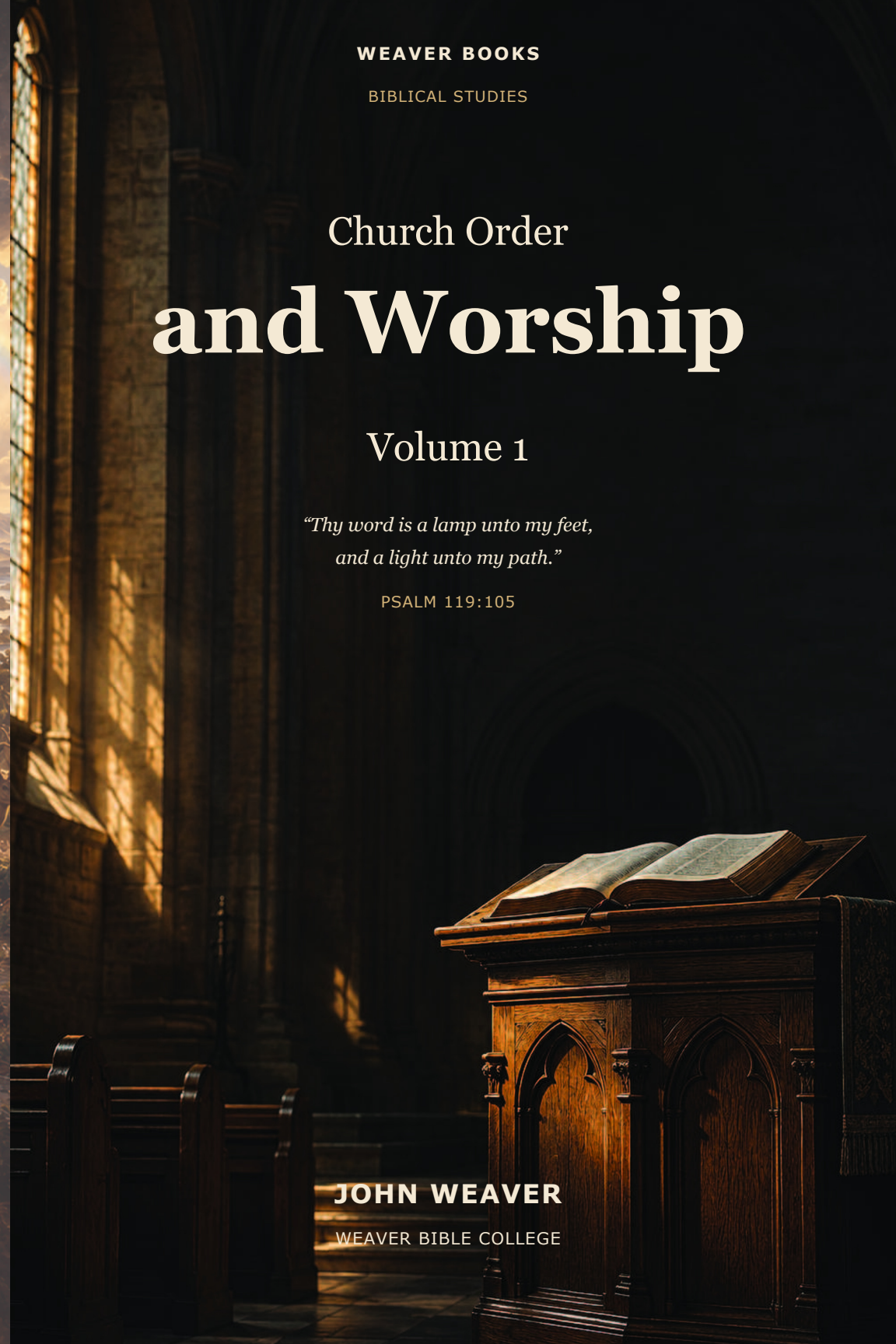
BIBLICAL STUDIES

Church Order and Worship

Volume 1

"Thy word is a lamp unto my feet,
and a light unto my path."

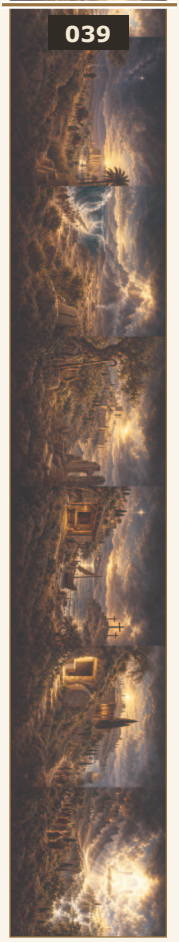
PSALM 119:105



JOHN WEAVER

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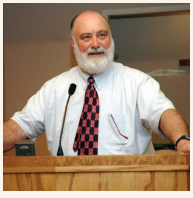
Let all things be done decently and in order.

1 CORINTHIANS 14:40

Church order, worship, preaching and Christian community are considered through this collection of sermons. John Weaver examines the authority of Scripture and its implications for the life of the church. Volume 1 is one of two volumes; the complete chapter sequence is preserved across the set. This volume contains original chapters 1–25.

“Biblical love is that which is shown not only toward God, but toward others as well.”

JOHN WEAVER



John Weaver

John Weaver's sermons form the teaching collection presented by Weaver Bible College. This volume gathers his teaching from that collection.

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WEAVER BOOKS

Church Order and Worship

Volume 1

Original chapters 1–25

John Weaver

Weaver Bible College

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Church Order and Worship

Volume 1

John Weaver

Weaver Books
Weaver Bible College

Edited from the sermon corpus of John Weaver.

Review edition. Existing edited chapters are preserved; newly restored chapters are based on their source transcripts and remain subject to editorial and publisher approval. This is Volume 1 of two, containing original chapters 1–25. Chapter numbering continues across the set. Contents and indexes refer only to this volume. Both volumes link to the companion study guide for the complete collection.

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CHAPTER 1

God is a Warrior

Introduction: The Need for Biblical Thinking on War

I want to begin a series on the biblical doctrine of war: when is it right to fight, and what does the Bible say about these things? I have been thinking and praying about this subject for a good while because there is so much controversy today.

In Hosea chapter 8, verse 12, God says concerning His people, "I have written to him the great things of my law, but they were counted as a strange thing." Note what God says: "I've written him the great things of my law, but they're counted as a strange thing."

Let me tell you a joke that I heard while I was gone. I am going to tell it for two reasons: I thought it was absolutely hilarious, and it fits with what I want to explain by way of introduction. The man who told this joke was from New Orleans, and he told it about two Cajuns. One was named Boudreaux, and the other was Thibodeau, very famous names back in New Orleans.

Thibodeau saw Boudreaux, whom he had not seen in a while. He said, "Boudreaux, where in the world have you been?" Boudreaux said, "Well, I've been away at college." He asked, "What have you

been studying?" Boudreaux replied, "I've been studying logic." He said, "What in the world is logic?" Boudreaux explained, "Well, it's a form of reasoning how you arrive at deductions."

Thibodeau said, "I don't understand what you're talking about." Boudreaux said, "Well, let me try to explain to you. Thibodeau, do you have a dog?" He answered, "Yes, I have a dog." Boudreaux said, "Well, if you have a dog, then logic tells me that you probably have a yard." He replied, "Yeah, man, I've got a yard." Boudreaux continued, "And logic either further tells me that if you've got a yard, you've probably got a fence around that yard since you live in town." "Yeah," he said, "man, I do have a fence around my yard." Boudreaux said, "And logic tells me that if you've got a dog and a yard and a fence, you probably have a house on that property as well."

He said, “Yeah, man, I've got a three-bedroom house.” Then he said, “You see, the logic tells me that if you've got a dog and a yard and a fence and a house, you're probably married.” “Yeah, man, I've been married. I got a wife.” He said, “You see, the logic tells me that if you're married, then you're not a homosexual.” “Oh,” he said, “I think I got this. Let me see if I understand this. Boudreaux, do you have a dog?” He said, “No, man, I don't have a dog.”

The reason I told that was to demonstrate that this is exactly how most people think. They do not think rationally or logically; and, let me go further, they do not even think scripturally or biblically. Humanism has captured the minds and bodies of Christendom. Our ideas, attitudes, philosophies, and even our actions are so contrary to the Bible and truth that when we hear Bible truth, we, like the people in Hosea's time, count it as something strange.

We hear God's truth, but we do not believe it or receive it. Why? Because it is strange, foreign, contrary to what we have heard, contrary to what we believe, and contrary to what we have been taught. God's truth is usually so contrary to the average person's thinking that when he hears it, he begins to think that what he is hearing must be wrong. Usually, when people hear real Bible preaching, they think the preacher is either making it up or taking it out of context. Or they explain it by saying, “That's simply his opinion.” They do not want to receive anything contrary to what they

were taught or believed all their lives. Most people are willing to believe and continue believing error rather than truth.

I am going to illustrate that amply in the message I am preaching today. The message is entitled, "God is a Warrior." Just that statement is strange to our ears, because we do not think of God in terms of a warrior. We certainly do not think of God as a warrior God. We have been taught all our lives that war is wrong, that God does not approve of war, or that war is a necessary evil—sometimes necessary, but still evil. I have known adults who refused to allow their little boys to play with guns, even little clay guns.

They refused to let them wrestle and tussle with their friends because they did not want their children to grow up and have a fighting mentality or a warrior mentality. Let me tell you something, though this is a different subject: Do you realize that every man is aggressive by nature? It is called dominion. That is the biblical term, but it is a fact.

I am thinking of one individual right now who raised that little boy and had never seen a gun. He did not watch television, and she was so protective of this little child. One day she looked outside, and he had picked up a stick and was going, "Pow, pow, pow." She said, "Where he got it, I don't know. But he got it."

We have come to the idea that all fighting is wrong. Let me ask a series of questions before I begin today. Is it right to fight against sin? Very obviously, the answer is yes. Is it right to fight against wickedness? The answer is yes. Is it right to fight for freedom? Yes. Is it right to fight to preserve one's life? Yes. Is it right to fight to preserve the lives of other people? The answer is yes. Is it right to fight for truth, justice, and righteousness? The answer is yes.

Now, if you say that all fighting is wrong, I have a question to ask you: Why does God fight? The Bible does say that God is a warrior and that God does fight.

If one denies the validity and morality of fighting, he not only accuses God of being immoral and wicked, but at the same time denies the validity of church discipline, family discipline, and civil justice or civil discipline. Church discipline, family discipline, and civil discipline are means of fighting against wickedness. When you

chastise your child, you do not chastise a child for being a child; you chastise a child because he has done something wicked and wrong. You do not discipline a church member merely because he is human. You discipline him because he is sinful and wicked and is failing to repent. When you discipline someone for violating the law of the land, you are fighting against anarchy and rebellion. Thus, when you make the point-blank statement that fighting is wicked or wrong, you are not only accusing God of being immoral and wicked; you are invalidating all the discipline we have in the land.

The truth of the matter is this: We must learn to fight, but we must learn to fight biblically in order to preserve ourselves, our church, our society, and even our nation. It may surprise you that the word war—milhamah in Hebrew—occurs 313 times in the Old Testament alone.

That is not talking about the words fighting, army, or armory. It is the word war. The word war occurs 313 times in the Old Testament. The word war, polemos in the Greek, occurs 18 times in the New Testament. Very obviously, there is a great deal of Scripture dealing with the subject of war.

When we understand that God is a warrior, we are going to learn to think scripturally and biblically. If we are going to be biblical in our fighting, then we must think the way God thinks on these subjects.

The Pervasiveness of the Warrior Theme in Scripture

Let me first give you a broad overview. I want you to understand that the theme of God as a warrior is taught throughout the Bible. It is the main theme of the Bible. For instance, let me give it to you in five statements. First of all, number one, God appears as a warrior who fights for Israel against her flesh-and-blood enemies. That is number one: God appears as a warrior who fights for Israel against her flesh-and-blood enemies.

I do not have to take the time to go through the Scripture and show you that. Everybody knows how God fought against the gods of Egypt. He fought against the Canaanites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, the Jebusites, and all those other enemies in the Bible. Very

obviously, God is a warrior, and God fought for Israel against her flesh-and-blood enemies.

Second, when Israel rebelled and sinned against God, God the warrior fought against Israel. Let me show you that in the Bible very quickly. Turn in your Bibles, if you would please, to 2 Chronicles, chapter 24. I will just show you about three passages. Look in 2 Chronicles, chapter 24 and verse 24. Watch what the Bible says: “For the army of the Syrians came with a small company of men, and the Lord delivered a very great host into their hand, because they had forsaken the Lord God of their fathers. So they executed judgment against Joash.” Now notice, God brought a very small handful of Syrians into the land, and God delivered a very great host of His people into their hands. Why? Because the people had sinned against God.

Look also at 2 Chronicles 25:20: “But Amaziah would not hear; for it came of God, that he might deliver them into the hand of their enemies, because they sought after the gods of Edom.” Here God is fighting against His people because of their sin and rebellion.

Look in 2 Chronicles 28 at verses 4 and 5: "He sacrificed also and burned incense in the high places, and on the hills, and under every green tree. Wherefore the Lord his God delivered him into the hand of the king of Syria; and they smote him, and carried away a great multitude of the captives, and brought them to Damascus. And he was also delivered into the hand of the king of Israel, who smote him with a great slaughter." Look in verse 9: "But a prophet of the Lord was there, whose name was Oded: and he went out before the host that came to Samaria, and said unto them, Behold, because the Lord God of your fathers was wroth with Judah, he hath delivered them into your hand, and ye have slain them in a rage that reacheth up unto heaven."

Note now that God is fighting in this passage against Judah. So you are going to find, number one, that God fought against Israel's flesh-and-blood enemies. But number two, when Israel—either the southern tribe, Judah, or the northern ten tribes—sinned against God, God always fought against His people.

Thirdly, the Old Testament ends with the prophets looking into the future and proclaiming the advent of a powerful divine warrior. Then, number four, Christ came as a warrior to deliver His people from sin, Satan, death, and their lesser enemies as well. Christ came as a divine warrior to deliver His people from sin, Satan, death, and their lesser enemies.

Zacharias, the father of John the Baptist, prophesied in Luke chapter 1, verse 67: "And his father Zacharias was filled with the Holy Ghost, and prophesied, saying, Blessed be the Lord God of Israel; for he hath visited and redeemed his people, and hath raised up an horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David; as he spake by the mouth of his holy prophets, which have been since the world began: that we should be saved from our enemies, and from the hand of all that hate us; to perform the mercy promised to our fathers, and to remember his holy covenant; the oath which he sware to our father Abraham, that he would grant unto us, that we being delivered out of the hand of our enemies might serve him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before him, all the days of our life."

Now this passage deals with the first coming of Christ. So Christ came as a warrior to deliver us from sin, Satan, and death. I could refer you to Hebrews chapter 2 and show you that as well, but also from our lesser enemies. And then number 5, Christ will return a second time as a divine warrior who will judge and destroy both the human and the spiritual enemies of God.

God as the Lord of Hosts (Armies)

This is simply an overview in the Bible of God as a warrior. The entire Bible is developed around the theme of God as the divine warrior. In fact, one of the names of God given over and over in Scripture is the Lord God of hosts, H-O-S-T-S. Whenever you read about the Lord God of hosts, understand that the word literally means the Lord God of the armies, both of heaven and earth. I may come back and develop a whole message just around this name of God, but I want you to see how many times it occurs and also note the context in which it occurs.

In 1 Samuel 1:3, we read, “And this man went up out of his city yearly to worship and to sacrifice unto the Lord of hosts in Shiloh. And the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, the priests of the Lord, were there.” Note that he went to sacrifice unto the Lord of hosts, that is, the God of the armies. In verse 11, Hannah is praying: “And she vowed a vow, and said, O Lord of hosts, if thou wilt indeed look on the affliction of thine handmaid.” She is praying to the God of the armies.

In 1 Samuel 4:4, we read, “So the people sent to Shiloh, that they might bring from thence the ark of the covenant of the Lord of hosts, which dwelleth between the cherubims.” Note the Lord of hosts. In 1 Samuel 15:2, God is sending Saul on a mission, and that mission is to destroy all of the Amalekites: “Thus saith the Lord of hosts, I remember that which Amalek did to Israel, how he laid wait for him in the way, when he came up from Egypt.” Note, thus saith the Lord of the armies: I remember what Amalek did. Now, Saul, I want you to go and to wipe him out.

In 1 Samuel 17:45, we see the story of David fighting Goliath. Look at what David says to the Philistine: “Then said David to the Philistine, Thou comest to me with a sword, and with a spear, and with a shield: but I come to thee in the name of the Lord of hosts.”

“The God of the armies of Israel, whom thou hast defied.” So now he explains who the Lord God of hosts is: He is the God of the armies of Israel.

There is an entire book in the Bible dedicated to war. Most people, when they think of such a book, probably think of Joshua. That is wrong. Joshua contains an awful lot of war, but the book I am thinking about is Numbers. Turn to the book of Numbers, and let me show you something.

The Book of Numbers: A Book of War

I get so tickled at people because I do not know how to say it. Sometimes I want to say ignorance, and sometimes I want to say stupidity. Whichever it is, I still get tickled, because I have heard preachers say, concerning their efforts to get humongous crowds any way that they can get them, that will God is interested in numbers

even have a book about the Bible. That is Boudreaux and Thibodeau once again, you see. But I want you to know that the book of Numbers deals with war because it deals with numbering the army. Look in your Bibles to Numbers, chapter 1.

Let me go through this very quickly. I am not going to show you all of it, but only a number of passages. Look in Numbers 1:3: “From twenty years old and upward, all that are able to go forth to war in Israel: thou and Aaron shall number them by their armies.” What is the book of Numbers about? It is a book of numbering the men who are able to fight.

Look at verse 20: “And the children of Reuben, Israel's eldest son, by their generations, after their families, by the house of their fathers, according to the number of the names, by their polls, every male from twenty years old and upward, all that were able to go forth to war.” Look at verse 22: “Of the children of Simeon, by their generations, after their families, by the house of their fathers, those that were numbered of them, according to the number of the names, by their polls, every male from twenty years old and upward, all that were able to go forth to war.”

Look at verse 24: “Of the children of Gad, by their generations, after their families, by the house of their fathers, according to the number of the names, from twenty years old and upward, all that were able to go forth to war.” Verse 26 says, “Of the children of Judah, by their generations, after their families, by the house of their fathers, according to the number of the names, from twenty years old and upward, all that were able to go forth to war.”

The latter part of verse 28 says, “Of the children of Issachar, all that were able to go forth to war.” Verse 30 says, “Of the children of Zebulun, all that were able to go forth to war.” Verse 32 says, “Of the children of Joseph, namely, of Ephraim, all that were able to go forth to war.” The latter part of verse 34 says, “Of the children of Manasseh, all that were able to go forth to war.” Verse 36 says, “Of the children of Benjamin, the latter part, all that were able to go forth to war.”

Verse 38 says, “Of the children of Dan, all that were able to go forth to war.” Verse 40 says, “Of the children of Asher, all that were

able to go forth to war." Verse 42 says, "Of the children of Naphtali, all that were able to go forth to war." Verse 45 says, "So were all those that were numbered of the children of Israel, by the house of their fathers, from twenty years old and upward, all that were able to go forth to war in Israel."

Over and over, God gives the number of all who were able to go forth to war. Now look at Numbers 10:9: "And if ye go to war in your land against the enemy that oppresseth you, then ye shall blow an alarm with the trumpets; and ye shall be remembered before the Lord your God, and ye shall be saved from your enemies." I am going to be teaching on this a little later, but note what God says: if you go to war in your land against the enemy that oppresses you, you blow the trumpet, and you shall be saved from your enemies. There is an order which God gives.

Look at Numbers 26. I am skipping through this just to show you how this book is a book of war. It does not matter where you look: Numbers chapter 26.

And note, if you would please, verse 2. God says, "Take the sum of all the congregation of the children of Israel, from twenty years old and upward, throughout their fathers' house, all that are able to go to war in Israel." Look at Numbers chapter 31 and verse 3. Numbers 31 verse 3. "And Moses spake unto the people, saying, Arm some of yourselves unto the war, and let them go against the Midianites, and avenge the Lord of Midian." Boy, that's a powerful verse. Avenge the Lord. In other words, you execute the Lord's wrath against the Midianites. I'm not going to take the time to read verses 4 through 53, but all of this is how they're selecting the men to go out to fight. So they were delivered out of the thousands of Israel, a thousand of every tribe, twelve thousand armed for the war. But I do want you to look at verse 21. Look at verse 21. "And Eleazar the priest said unto the men of war which went to the battle, This is the ordinance of the law which the Lord commanded Moses."

Now it may surprise you, and I'm going to preach on it and teach on it a little bit later, but do you realize there was an ordinance for war? God says, here are my rules for warfare. And Eleazar is going to lay down the ordinances of booty and everything that is there. Then look in Numbers chapter 32 at verse 20. Numbers 32 verse 20. "And

Moses said unto them, If ye will do this thing, if ye will go armed before the Lord to war." Now note that phrase, "armed before the Lord to war." Then look in verse 27, Numbers 32 verse 27. "But thy servants will pass over, every man armed for war, before the Lord to battle, as my lord saith." I'm going to develop that thought a little bit later. But I want you to note that these men went over armed before the Lord.

Now, let me ask a question. Is God a warrior? And the answer is yes. There's not only a whole book in the Bible dedicated to war, but I want you to understand that the way God delivered Israel out of Egypt was by means of war. I want you to turn in your Bibles to the book of Deuteronomy chapter 4. Deuteronomy chapter 4. If I took the time today to show you the ten plagues, I would want you to understand that each of those plagues was aimed at one of the gods of Egypt. Literally, what you had in those ten plagues was God warring or fighting against the gods of Egypt. But look in your Bible Deuteronomy chapter 4 verse 32 and let's begin and let me show you how God delivered the children of Israel out of Egypt. Deuteronomy chapter 4 verse 32.

God's Deliverance of Israel as an Act of War

"For ask now of the days that are past, which were before thee, since the day that God created man upon the earth, and ask from the one side of heaven unto the other, whether there hath been any such thing as this great thing is, or hath been heard like it? Did ever people hear the voice of God speaking out of the midst of the fire, as thou hast heard, and live? Or hath God assayed to go and take him a nation from the midst of another nation, by temptations, by signs, and by wonders, and by war, and by a mighty hand, and by a stretched out arm, and by great terrors, according to all that the Lord your God did for you in Egypt before your eyes?"

So Moses wrote and said it was an act of war on God's part against Egypt and against those false gods when God delivered Israel out of the land. Now, if war and fighting are inherently sinful, that is, if war and fighting are morally wicked and wrong in themselves, would God ever engage in such practices?

And the answer is no. Very obviously, war is not evil in and of itself. Fighting is not evil in and of itself. What does that mean? It means we're going to have to re-educate ourselves. We're going to have to learn to think scripturally and biblically. There are hard times coming in our country. You say, "Brother Weaver, why in the world are you preaching this?"

Let me tell you something. If you ever get in a pinch and have to sit there and wonder, Well, should I fight or should I not fight? It is too late. You are dead. You better know what God says about the subject before that time ever comes. You better have your mind made up. You better say, I know what the Bible says, I know what God's rules are, and therefore I'm going to obey God. It is not wrong to fight for the right reasons. It is not wrong even to war for the right reasons. Let me show you how God Himself fights.

God Fights for His People

Now, if fighting is inherently wicked, if fighting is morally wrong, I want you to explain these passages for me. Deuteronomy chapter 1, verse 30: "The Lord your God which goeth before you, he shall fight for you, according to all that he did for you in Egypt before your eyes." Who is going to do the fighting? It is God who is going to do the fighting. Look in Deuteronomy chapter 2, beginning there with verse 19.

SCRIPTURE READING - Deuteronomy 2:19-22 (KJV)

> "And when thou comest nigh over against the children of Ammon, distress them not, nor meddle with them: for I will not give thee of the land of the children of Ammon any possession; because I have given it unto the children of Lot for a possession. (That also was accounted a land of giants: giants dwelt therein in old time; and the Ammonites call them Zamzummims; a people great, and many, and tall, as the Anakims; but the Lord destroyed them before them; and they succeeded them, and dwelt in their stead: as he did to the children of Esau, which dwelt in Seir, when he destroyed the Horims from before them; and they succeeded them, and dwelt in their stead even unto this day.)" Now, twice the Bible has said in this passage that God has destroyed a people. Look in verse 24.

"Rise ye up, take your journey, and pass over the river Arnon: behold, I have given into thine hand Sihon the Amorite, king of Heshbon, and his land: begin to possess it, and contend with him in battle." God said, you find him. From Aroer, which is by the brink of the river of Arnon, and from the city that is by the river, even unto Gilead, there was not one city too strong for us: the Lord our God delivered all unto us. Note it is God who is fighting.

In chapter 3, the Lord said: "Fear him not: for I will deliver him, and all his people, and his land, into thy hand; and thou shalt do unto him as thou didst unto Sihon king of the Amorites, which dwelt at Heshbon." Did you hear that? "So the Lord our God delivered into our hands Og also, the king of Bashan, and all his people: and we smote him until none was left to him remaining."

You don't want genocide. You don't want wiping out a people. And it was God who was delivering Og and his people into the hands of the children of Israel. The same chapter says: "Thine eyes have seen all that the Lord your God hath done unto these two kings: so shall the Lord do unto all the kingdoms whither thou passest. Ye shall not fear them: for the Lord your God he shall fight for you."

Now, if fighting is inherently wrong, if war is inherently wicked, explain to me how God can be a warrior and God can be a fighter. Very obviously, they are not inherently wicked in and of themselves. All fighting is not wrong. All war is not wrong. Granted, there are times that fighting is wicked and wrong, and there are times that wars are wicked and wrong. But just because some wars and some fights are wicked and wrong does not mean that all wars are wicked and wrong.

God's Arsenal and His People as Weapons

Since God is a warrior, God even has His own arsenal. Every warrior has his weapons. God has an entire armory. Jeremiah 50:25 says: "The Lord hath opened his armoury, and hath brought forth the weapons of his indignation: for this is the work of the Lord God of hosts in the land of the Chaldeans."

“The Lord hath opened his armoury.” You know what an armory is? That is why we call them the National Guard armories. That is

where the weapons are stored. The Lord God had opened his armory and had brought forth the weapons of his indignation. Look in your Bibles to Jeremiah 51:20. God says, “Thou art my battle axe and weapons of war. For with thee will I break in pieces the nations, and with thee will I destroy kingdoms.”

How does that grab you? God says, “For thou art my battle axe and my weapons of war.” Is that not interesting? We, the people of God, are to be God’s battle axe and God’s weapons of war. So, very obviously, fighting in and of itself is not wicked. Wars in and of themselves are not wicked. Otherwise, if they were, God certainly would not be a warrior. But the Bible says that God is a warrior.

God Teaches His People to Fight

If fighting and war were inherently wicked and evil, not only why would God be a warrior, but why would God also teach others to fight? You say, “Well, Weaver, God doesn’t teach people to fight.” Oh, yes, I can show you. Look in your Bibles to Judges 3. Let us read verses 1 and 2 and find out why God allowed some of these Canaanites to be left in the land. “Now these are the nations which the Lord left, to prove Israel by them, even as many of Israel as had not known all the wars of Canaan; only that the generations of the children of Israel might know, to teach them war, at the least such as before knew nothing thereof.” God said, I left some enemies in here just to teach you how to fight, just to teach you about war.

Look in your Bibles to Psalm 18:34. David says, “He teacheth my hands to war, so that a bow of steel is broken by mine arms.” Who taught David how to fight? David said, God taught me how to fight. God taught my hands to war, so much so that a bow of steel is broken in my arms. Look also at Psalm 144, beginning with verse 1. You will find this exact same truth taught in 2 Samuel 22:35.

But look in Psalm 144. David says in verse 1, “Blessed be the Lord my strength, which teacheth my hands to war, and my fingers to fight: my goodness, and my fortress; my high tower, and my deliverer; my shield, and he in whom I trust; who subdueth my people under me.” So David says, “Blessed be the Lord my strength, which teacheth my hands to war and my fingers to fight.” Very obviously, if fighting and wars were inherently evil and wicked in

themselves, then God would not be a warrior, nor would He teach other people to fight.

God Preserves Warriors and Directs Wars

Consider another truth in 1 Chronicles 18. If war and fighting are inherently wicked, why would God preserve those who were engaged in such practices? In the context of war and fighting, verse 6 says, “Then David put garrisons in Syria-damascus; and the Syrians became David's servants, and brought gifts. Thus the Lord preserved David whithersoever he went.” Skip down to verse 13: “And he put garrisons in Edom; and all the Edomites became David's servants. Thus the Lord preserved David whithersoever he went.” What is God doing? He is providentially protecting and preserving David as David fights.

That is the only reason anyone ever comes out alive from any war: God's providential preservation and protection. I remember when I was in service. We went out at night to what they called a firefight. There was a twelve-man squad. Back then, the weapon was a BAR, a Browning Automatic Rifle. Some of you men who have been in service know what I am talking about. There were twelve men, and the man on each end had a BAR. The others usually had M1s or something similar.

Every one of them had a field of fire, and those fields of fire crossed. If I were sitting here, my field of fire would be from Chester to Ed. If Don were over here, his would be from Chester to Ed this way, or whatever. In other words, all the fires crisscrossed. Every fifth bullet was a tracer; for every red streak you saw, there were four bullets you did not see. When they put that field of fire on for all these new recruits—and I was one of them—all you could see was a solid sheet of red.

Men crawl through that through war after war, miraculously. Why? Only because God preserved them. That is what the Bible says about David: God was preserving David, whithersoever he went. In the context, it is dealing with fighting.

Now let me bring this message on God as a warrior to a head and make some applications. Someone may say, “Brother Weaver, I am

still not convinced." Well, let me show you. Turn first to the book of Numbers, chapter 21. If these two main passages cannot show you the truth, you are not going to believe it if I showed you forty million passages.

Look in Numbers 21 and note verse 14: "Wherefore it is said in the book of the wars of the Lord, What he did in the Red sea, and in the brooks of Arnon." Did you know that all of those wars in the Old Testament that were fought at the direction of God are referred to as the wars of the Lord? The wars of the Lord. Numbers 21:14 says, "Wherefore it is said in the book of the wars of the Lord, what he did." Thus, all those wars Israel engaged in at the direction and at the quest of God were referred to as the wars of the Lord.

They are God's wars. God initiated them, and God brought them to an end. If that passage is not sufficient, look back in your Bibles to Exodus, chapter 15, and verse 3. I saved this passage until now. In fact, let us begin reading with verse 1: "Then sang Moses and the children of Israel this song unto the Lord, and spake, saying, I will sing unto the Lord, for he hath triumphed gloriously: the horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea. The Lord is my strength and song, and he is become my salvation: he is my God, and I will prepare him an habitation; my father's God, and I will exalt him. The Lord is a man of war: the Lord is his name." Did you see that? The Lord—that is, Jehovah, Yahweh—is a man of war. Jehovah is his name.

Since God is a man of war, understand that He is always captain of His hosts. Look first in your Bibles to Joshua chapter 5. The people are about to fight against Jericho, their first real battle. In Joshua 5:13 we read, "And it came to pass, when Joshua was by Jericho, that he lifted up his eyes and looked, and, behold, there stood a man over against him with his sword drawn in his hand."

That would get your attention, wouldn't it? It would be like stepping out of this building and finding a fellow pointing a .357 Magnum at your head. You would do a double-take. Joshua sees this man with a sword drawn in his hand, walks up to him, and asks, "Art thou for us, or for our adversaries?" That is a logical question: Are you for me or against me? If somebody points a pistol my way, I want to know whether he is one of me or one of them.

Look at the answer: “And he said, Nay; but as captain of the host of the Lord am I now come. And Joshua fell on his face to the earth, and did worship, and said unto him, What saith my lord unto his servant? And the captain of the Lord’s host said unto Joshua, Loose thy shoe from off thy foot; for the place whereon thou standest is holy. And Joshua did so.” What did God tell Joshua? “Joshua, I came to direct. I’m the head of this army. I’m the captain. I’ll tell you what to do.”

Now look at 2 Chronicles 13:12. The king says, “And, behold, God himself is with us for our captain, and his priests with sounding trumpets to cry alarm against you. O children of Israel, fight ye not against the Lord God of your fathers; for ye shall not prosper.” This was a war between Israel and Judah. The king of Judah said, “Behold, God himself is with us as our captain.” If you read the context, you will find that Judah whipped Israel because Israel had sinned against God. Yet he said, “God is with us as our captain.” Now turn back to 2 Chronicles chapter 6, because here is an interesting verse: God, as captain of His host, often sends for His armies.

God Sends, Ambushes, and Fights for His People

Look at this prayer. This is Solomon's prayer when he is dedicating the temple to God. In verse 34 he says, "If thy people go out to war against their enemies by the way that thou shalt send them, and they pray unto thee toward this city which thou hast chosen, and the house which I have built for thy name; then hear thou from the heavens their prayer and their supplication, and maintain their cause."

Those sending the people out to war—someone tell me, God is. “By the way that thou shalt send them,” and they pray unto thee toward this city which thou hast chosen, and the house which I have built for thy name's sake, “then hear thou,” and he goes on. But he said that thy people go out to war against their enemies by the way that thou shalt send them. So God, as captain, sends forth His people to war.

I want you to look in your Bibles to 2 Chronicles, chapter 20 and verse 22. Here is an interesting verse: you will find that God is not only captain, and that God only sends His people to fight, but that

God Himself often sets ambushes for His enemies. 2 Chronicles, chapter 20, verse 22.

"And when they began to sing and to praise, the Lord set ambushments against the children of Ammon, Moab, and mount Seir, which were come against Judah; and they were smitten." Why were they smitten? Because God ambushed them. God set His ambushes. He's a man of war. Sometimes God's people need not even fight, because God fights the battle himself. He says in verse 17, "Ye shall not need to fight in this battle: set yourselves, stand ye still, and see the salvation of the Lord with you, O Judah and Jerusalem: fear not, nor be dismayed; to morrow go out against them: for the Lord will be with you." Fear not, nor be dismayed. Tomorrow go out against them, for the Lord will be with you. They didn't have to fight. God discomfited them.

Now, I want you to look at one last passage, 1 Chronicles 5 and verse 22. I'm going to try to reconcile some of these passages for you in the following weeks, but I want you to look at this passage: "For there fell down many slain, because the war was of God. And they dwelt in their steads until the captivity." Did you hear that? There fell down many slain. That is, many people were killed. Why? Because the war was of God. You say, "Brother Weaver, how in the world can God use war? Why would God use war?"

Applications: Just Violence and the Error of Pacifism

Well, you'll have to come back next week to find out. Now, let me make some applications. I want you to understand that, just from our study this morning, we can derive this principle: There is a proper and a just violence. That does not mean that all violence is right, but it does mean that there is a proper violence that is right, that is just. There is a war, there is a violence that is grounded in the principles of the justice, holiness, and the wrath of God. When you find a violence that is grounded in the principles of the justice, and the holiness, and the wrath of God, then you find a just violence and a just war.

Secondly, listen carefully: pacifism. Does everybody know what pacifism is?

Mennonites and the Amish are known for their pacifism. Pacifism, listen carefully, is anti-God, anti-Bible, and anti-Christian because it rejects the fundamental opposition between righteousness and sin. Pacifism teaches that the ultimate sin is violence. That is not true. The ultimate sin is sin, wickedness, and rebellion. Violence is not necessarily wrong. God is using violence, has used violence, and has Himself become engaged in it. There is a proper use of violence. Without a principle of righteousness and justice, violence is wrong; but when righteousness and justice are present, it restrains evil.

If you do not have just violence, just force, or just war, then you have no restraint upon violence and wickedness. Pacifism elevates violence and wickedness because it refuses to punish wickedness, wrong, and wicked violence. In essence, pacifism endorses and promotes evil by failing to punish it.

Thirdly, understand that God does not make war upon the righteous, but He makes war upon the wicked. Therefore, you had better learn to be right. God allows evil to reach a certain level, and then He judges and punishes it. In Genesis 6, the wickedness of man had come up before God's face, and He sent the flood and drowned those antediluvians. In Genesis 15, when God told Abraham that he and his seed would be strangers in a strange land for 400 years, He also told him why: “The cup of iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full.”

God Wars Against the Wicked, Not the Righteous

When 430 years passed, God brought the children of Israel out of Egypt. He put a sword in their hand and said, “Kill everyone.” Why? Because the cup of iniquity had reached the proper level. God does not fight against the righteous; God fights against the wicked, because God is a warrior. We need to learn a warrior's mentality, but the warrior we need to emulate is the Lord God Himself, who fights righteously and justly according to His law and His principles.

Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we bow to Thee. We thank Thee that Thou art indeed a warrior king. We thank Thee that Thou dost indeed fight for Thy people. Does it matter how great or how numerous our enemies are? Thou art the sovereign warrior. Thou art the holy, omnipotent God, who is able to subdue all things and bring

all things into subjection to thy Son and to thy people. We give thee praise today.

Instruct us, illuminate us, encourage us. In the name of Christ we pray. Amen.

This program was produced by Dominion Ministry. For more information about Pastor Weaver's sermons, you may contact Dominion Ministry by mail at 7400 Abercorn Street, Suite 705, PMB 175, Savannah, Georgia, 31406.

CHAPTER 2

The Revival in the Confederate Armies

Introduction: Rehearsing God's Mighty Works

The historical message concerns the revival in the Confederate armies, and Psalm 44 provides the foundation:

"We have heard with our ears, O God, our fathers have told us what work Thou didst in their days and times of old. How Thou didst drive out the heathen with Thine hand and plantedst them. How Thou didst afflict the people and cast them out. For they got not the land in possession by their own sword, neither did their own arm save them, but Thy right hand, and Thine arm, and the light of Thy countenance, because Thou hadst a favor unto them. Thou art my King, O God, command deliverances for Jacob.

"Through Thee will we push down our enemies. Through Thy name will we tread them under that rise up against us. For I will not trust in my bow, neither shall my sword save me. But Thou hast saved us from our enemies, and hast put them to shame that hated us. In God we boast all the day, and praise Thy name forever."

This passage will be covered before the close. Notice the words, “We have heard with our ears, O God. Our fathers have told us what work Thou didst in their days in times of old.” Verse one rehearses the mighty works and mighty acts of God, specifically His providential dealings with His people and even the redemption of His people. The subject, then, is the revival in the Confederate armies.

The Uniqueness of the War and Its Spiritual Neglect

When we consider the War of Northern Aggression, we must conclude that it has no parallel in history. The amount of land mass involved, the huge number of troops, the devastation, the battles, the sieges, the marches, the contending armies, the enthusiasm, the conquest, and even the men themselves make that period of history absolutely unique.

Many people have studied the war from every conceivable angle. It does not matter whether one considers it economically, politically, or governmentally—all angles. But very few have ever looked at this war from the spiritual angle. In fact, there is indeed a great, vast spiritual implication to this war as well.

America as a nation was in a great period of spiritual decline, especially from the 1830s to the 1850s. Churches were dissolving, denominations were breaking up, and generally speaking, it did not look good for our nation. There were many statesmen who recognized that if the churches could not hold together, then certainly the nation could not hold together. There were many statements that quote-unquote prophesied that there was going to be a split in the Union, and so there was. But it may surprise many people to realize that before the War of Northern Aggression, practically all denominations were national.

Pre-War Denominational Unity and Theological Decline

When I say national, it was simply the Baptist Church. It was not the American Baptist, the Northern Baptist, or the Southern Baptist. Likewise, it was simply the Presbyterian Church. You did not have the PCA, the Orthodox Presbyterian, or the Presbyterian United.

Before this war, most of our denominations were national, and there was indeed national cooperation between the churches, whether they were in the North or in the South.

The interesting thing is that denominations that differed theologically would still cooperate for the furtherance of Christianity, and they would do so without any hesitation whatsoever. The real reason was that at that period each church and each denomination basically held to the supremacy of the Scriptures, and that salvation was in Jesus Christ and in Him alone. The Bible, then, was viewed as the infallible Word of God.

However, during this period of time, abolitionism, modernism, liberalism, and transcendentalism began to slip into the churches and denominations, especially in the North. Consequently, there was no longer any cooperation between the North and the South, because there was no basis for any fellowship or harmony. In fact, the rift became so great that many southern theologians realized a theological war was taking place.

James Henley Thornwell, who lived from 1812 to 1862 and was a prominent Presbyterian theologian and author, stated the differences between the North and the South very concisely. This was his analysis, not merely his own; most other southern pastors agreed with him. He said, "The parties in this conflict are not merely abolitionists and slaveholders. They are atheists, Socialists, Communists, Red Republicans, and Jacobins on the one side," the North, "and the Friends of Order and Regulated Freedom on the other," the South.

The War as a Theological and Cultural Conflict

"In one word, the world is the battleground, Christianity and atheism the combatants, and the progress of humanity is at stake."

It was not merely a war between the abolitionists, those who wished to free the slaves, and the slaveholders, those who wished to keep the slaves. No, it was far deeper than that. In reality, it boiled down to a war between Christianity and atheism. The world was the battleground, and the outcome would determine which direction we would face and which direction we would go. The truth of the matter

is this: in reality, the War of Northern Aggression was really and truly sparked by a theological revolution that had taken place in the North.

The spiritual side of this struggle is just as valid and just as important as the economic, political, and governmental sides. Does it matter if you say there were economics involved? Sure, there were economics involved. Were states' rights involved? Sure, there were states' rights involved. Were views of government involved? Sure, there were views of government involved. But you have got to remember: your view of economics, your view of politics, and your view of government—all of this—is determined by your theology. It is determined by your view of God, or lack thereof, and your view of Scripture, or lack thereof.

Many people have not really understood the political consequences of a theological shift. Once your theology changes, everything else changes as well. A theological change must always precede a cultural change. You cannot have a change in culture until you have a change in theology.

What happened in the North was that it changed theologically. It left the Word of God. Not everyone in the North left the Word of God; surely there were some believers there. But, generally speaking, Unitarianism had taken over: a denial of Christ, a denial of the Bible, and a denial of spiritual things. Man's reasoning was elevated. Basically speaking, humanism had taken over the churches and denominations of the North. Since they changed theologically in the North, they changed culturally in the North.

If you really believe that you are right, and that your theology is right, what do you want to do? You want to proselytize other people; that is, you want to make converts. The North wanted converts to humanism and abolitionism as well. Therefore, it took over many churches. In fact, it took over Oberlin College, which was begun by Charles Grandison Finney, or Finney's evangelism was stolen by Tome and several of these other men at Oberlin College, and abolitionism was spread throughout the country through the churches. It was an evangelistic zeal, so to speak.

Denominational Splits and Prophetic Warnings

What the North wanted to do was force its theology and culture upon the South. It did so through abolitionism, humanism, and reconstructionism. The period of Reconstruction after the war was over was nothing less than a military enforcement of Northern theology and culture upon the South. That is all it was: a military enforcement of Northern theology and culture upon the South.

The churches and denominations actually divided in this way. The Presbyterian Church was the first to divide. In fact, the Presbyterian denomination divided twice, once in 1837 and then again in 1857. In both instances, abolitionism was a prime issue.

Other issues were involved. I am not going to go into the old lights versus the new lights, but abolitionism was a prime issue. The Presbyterian Church split in 1837 and again in 1857. The Methodist Episcopal Church split in 1844, and the Baptists split in 1845. Do you realize there was no such thing as a Southern Baptist church until 1845? The reason the Southern Baptist churches came about was the North's pushing of abolitionism and humanism upon the South. The Southern people said, "Look, if that is what it is going to be, we will just leave and start our own." Basically, that is what happened in 1845.

Charles Hodge was a very eminent Presbyterian theologian. I have several of his volumes, and his three-volume work on systematic theology is quite excellent. But Charles Hodge said this: "...abolitionism must operate to produce the disunion of the states and the division of all ecclesiastical societies. We shall become two nations in feeling, which must soon render us two nations in fact."

Listen to what this Presbyterian preacher said. Abolitionism, which is nothing more than modernism and humanism, would soon divide all the churches and then divide the nation. Why? Because we would become two different societies in feeling, ultimately making us two different societies in fact.

One of the greatest warnings ever issued to this country was given by the preacher William S. Plumer on the eve of a split in the Presbyterian Church in 1837. Plumer has some wonderful books as well. Listen to what he said: "Should the assembly legislate and

decide that slaveholding is a sin?" This was being forced upon the churches and denominations by the abolitionists in the North. "The southern churches would all feel themselves instructed by the Apostle Paul to withdraw from such" (1 Timothy 6:5). "Thus, our church would be rent asunder."

"Then nothing will be left except to rend the star-spangled banner in twain. Soon the Potomac will be dyed with blood. Can it be that the righteous judge of all the earth has so dreadful a controversy with the Presbyterian Church of the United States as to give her up to the folly and madness of being the first to hoist the gate and let the flood of destruction roll in?"

This man said this in 1837. He said, "When the church is split wide open, there's nothing else left but to rend the star-spangled banner, and pretty soon the Potomac will be dyed with blood." He knew what was going to happen in this country.

A correspondent for the Charleston Mercury wrote in 1845, at the formation of the Southern Baptist Convention: "From all appearances, the separation of the church is inevitable. We could hope otherwise, but so it is and we must submit. When we are forced out of the church by northern fanatics, we shall next be forced out of the union by the same nefarious acts."

In 1845, he said that when they were forced out of the church, they would be forced out of the Union. Men at that time understood that it was a theological war and a cultural war.

I could multiply quotations, but these are sufficient to show that the churches were at their lowest ebb. The Southern churches, although affected by the splits, still held tenaciously to biblical principles. They still believed the Bible, and they still believed that the Lord Jesus Christ alone was the only Lord and the only Savior.

The South's Resilience and the Role of Revival

One of the most amazing things to me about the War of Northern Aggression is that the South held out as long as it did against such tremendous odds. The South fought for four long years. Numerically, we were outnumbered four to one: there were four times as many men in the North to fight as there were in the South. The North had

greater manufacturing abilities—in fact, practically all the manufacturing was in the North—greater firepower, greater financing, greater resources, and greater advantages in a multitude of ways. Yet it took them four long, hard years to subdue the South. Why?

Remember First Manassas, the first battle—First Bull Run, as some call it. We say First Manassas. Abraham Lincoln called for 75,000 volunteers for three months. The expectation was that it would be a piece of cake to whip the South: all they needed was 75,000 men and three months. Do you remember that first battle, when the North marched down to Manassas?

Here were the congressmen and civilians, with their wagons and picnic lunches. All these folks from Washington, D.C., settled down on the grass to watch the North whip the South while they enjoyed their picnics. That was their attitude: it was going to be a picnic.

Well, you know the story. It was not the North whipping the South. The South whipped the socks off the North. The men threw down their weapons, left their howitzers and cannon, and ran as quickly as they could back to Washington, D.C. Many civilians were trampled, and many were hurt in the escape.

But the point is this: it was going to be a piece of cake for the North to whip the South—or so they thought. How could the South hold out for four long, hard, strenuous years against such odds—militarily, economically, and in firepower? You say, “But Brother Weaver, the South had better generals.” I agree. The South did have better generals. But why did the South have better generals? You say, “Southern men were greater and better fighters.” That is true too. But why were they greater and better fighters? It was not simply because the South was defending their hearths and homes. I am going to tell you up front.

I believe that one answer lies in the fact that God graciously, mercifully, and sovereignly sent revival in the southern armies, where multitudes of men were swept into the kingdom of God. If you know anything about the Bible, you know that it is God who gives strength, courage, boldness, character, and consistency. It is God who enables one to persevere under the most extreme

circumstances. When one understands the grace of God and his duty to stand for truth, righteousness, and justice, it increases and solidifies the fighting spirit.

Christian Courage in Battle

Nehemiah chapter 4 and verse 14 says, “Be not ye afraid of them. Remember the Lord, who is great and terrible, and fight for your brethren, your sons, your daughters, your wives, and your houses.”

You remember the Lord your God, who is great and powerful. It is God who is going to give you the strength, courage, boldness, and perseverance. Trust in Him and fight for your wives, your houses, your children, and your land.

In 1 Corinthians 16:13, the Apostle Paul says, “Watch ye, stand ye fast in the faith, quit ye like men, and be strong.” I am trying to show you that when biblical principles, truth, and righteousness are involved, if you are a child of God, they increase and solidify your fighting spirit. Do you realize that, historically, Christian men have always made the greatest fighters? That is a fact. From 1776 on down, in any war in which our country has been involved, it has been Southern men who have done most of the fighting. The South, remember, has been known as the Bible Belt.

Historically, Christian men have made the greatest fighters because they normally fight based upon principles. They are prepared to die and are unafraid to die for those very principles. That is what made them the better fighters. Oliver Cromwell, the Ironsides of England, gathered about him Christian men who went into battle singing psalms and hymns, whose watchword was the Lord of Hosts. Oliver Cromwell said, “Truly, I think he that prays and preaches best will fight the best.” Hedley Vickers, who was an excellent Christian soldier himself, said, “I have often heard it said that the worst man, the better soldier. Facts contradict this untruth. Were I ever as a leader of a forlorn hope allowed to select my men, it would most certainly be from among the soldiers of Christ who should fight so fearlessly and bravely as those to whom death presents no terrors.” If he could pick his men for a forlorn hope—a hope that had absolutely no chance of making it—he would pick Christian men, because they would fight the best.

They are not afraid of dying, are prepared to die, and recognize truth and righteousness and are willing to give their lives for them. Even the enemies of the saints recognize the fierceness and determination of Christian men fighting for a righteous cause. This was said concerning the Southern men.

It has been said that there is nothing more ferocious than a band of brigands led by vicious cutthroats. Stop and think about this: there is nothing more ferocious than such a band, except a band of Scottish Presbyterians rising from their knees in prayer to do battle with a firm conviction that what they are about to do is the will of God. They fight a whole lot more fiercely than brigands led by vicious cutthroats.

Captain Dabney Carr Harrison, a Confederate pastor, professor, chaplain, and soldier, was told by some of his men, "You should be braver than the rest of us." He asked, "Why so?" They replied, "Because you have everything settled for eternity. You have nothing to fear after death." He answered, "Well, gentlemen, you are right. Everything is settled for eternity, and I have nothing to fear." Captain Harrison exemplified that fearlessness at Fort Donelson, where he fell mortally wounded.

Three balls passed through his hat without harming him; a fourth cut his temple, and a fifth went through his right lung, which was the fatal wound. Before he died, he wrote in his diary on Sunday, February 16, 1862, "I die content and happy, trusting in the merits of my Savior Jesus, committing my wife and children to their Father and mine." Soon he passed into a deep sleep, but even then he could not keep his mind from his men. Awakening from that deep sleep, he sat erect in his bed and shouted, "Company K, you have no captain now, but never give up and never surrender." One of the men caught him and laid him back down, where he died peacefully.

How in the world can you prevail against men who will not give up and will not despair even in death? Here was a man challenging his men, although he was dying, never to give up and never to surrender. Colonel Lewis Minor Coleman, fatally wounded at Fredericksburg, lingered ninety-eight days before he died, in grievous pain. Before his death, he gave charges to those around him, thanked his loving and faithful wife, and said to one of his men,

“Tell General Jackson and General Lee, they know how Christian soldiers can fight, and I wish they could see now how a Christian soldier can die.” Colonel Coleman died trusting only in the merits of Jesus Christ. One who does not know the power and conviction of the converting grace of God cannot grasp the significance of this truth.

One who does not know the converting power and converting grace of God cannot grasp the significance of this truth. Why should any child of God fear death when he knows, according to the Bible, that to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord?

In Philippians chapter 1, the Apostle Paul had been thrown into prison. Finally, he did lose his head with the axe. Every time he was imprisoned, there was always the possibility that he might die. Paul said, “For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. But if I live in the flesh, this is the fruit of my labor. Yet what I shall choose I know not. For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart and to be with Christ, which is far better. Nevertheless, to abide in the flesh is more needful for you.”

Paul was in prison and might have his head cut off. He was in a strait, in a pickle, in a tight. He had a desire to depart and be with Christ, which was far better for him; nevertheless, to abide in the flesh was more needful for them. In other words, he probably needed to stick around, teach a little more, and preach a little more.

If he could have had his druthers, he would rather have been with Christ. Thus Paul was saying, “For me to live is Christ and to die is gain.” It would not hurt him to die, and it would not hurt him to live. If he lived, he would live for Christ; if he died, he would die for Christ. Either way, he belonged to Christ, and there would be no problem in his life or in his death. Understandably, then, it was better for Paul to die and be with Christ.

Nevertheless, he said, to abide in the flesh was more needful for God’s people. At First Manassas, Stonewall Jackson received a painful wound in his hand, yet remained calm and deliberate. He continued to command with great resolution and courage while mini-balls whizzed by and cannons exploded everywhere. A few days after the battle, Captain John Imboden asked him, “Major Jackson,

how is it that you remained so calm and appeared so cool, an utterly insensitive to danger in such a storm of shell and bullets as rained upon you when your hand was hit?" Jackson replied, "Captain, my religious belief teaches me to feel as safe in battle as in bed."

"God has determined the time of my death. I do not concern myself about it, but to be always ready whenever it may overtake me." After a pause, he added, "Captain, that is the way all men should live. And then all would be equally brave." Listen to what he said: "My religious belief teaches me to feel as safe in battle as in bed." Jackson said, "I just didn't go to battle as I had go to bed." That bothered me.

I am not concerned about dying. God has determined my time. I am not even to worry about it. The only thing I am concerned about is being ready whenever that time may overtake me.

Before you object and say, "But Pastor, you are talking about the revival and these great revivals in the Confederate armies. I too would be willing to make a decision for Christ if I faced imminent death on a daily basis," let me say, first, that these were not decisions. These were genuine conversions.

Genuineness of the Conversions

Secondly, each of us faces death on a daily basis, because we do not know when we are going to die. I thought my time had come last week. I fell flat on my back and was knocked breathless. It took me five minutes to get up; then I could barely walk. I was thankful that I could at least get up. Just that quickly, we do face death on a daily basis.

Thirdly, allow me to give you an illustration of the genuineness of these conversions. Dr. J. William Jones kept the names of 410 men whom he baptized. After the war, he followed up on those who had survived and found that, of the 410, only three were not persevering in the faith. Only three did not continue? I can assure you that there is no pastor or church today that can boast of such a high percentage of persevering conversions. These were real, genuine conversions. These men had been thoroughly convicted and converted by the Holy Spirit.

God sent revival in the Confederate armies. A writer from the 2nd Palmetto Regiment to the Southern Christian Advocate says, “God's hand was in this great achievement. And I believe that the most irreligious man in our Patriot Army will frankly acknowledge the fact. So evident was it, it is believed, and improvement has since taken place in the morals of our troops. At least I can say as much for this regiment. Whilst during the campaign we have occupied the advanced post, the post of honor and danger, and this for weeks in the very face of the enemy.”

God has given us a grateful sense of security, and our religious services have gone on. Though interrupted by the booming cannon and bursting shell, lying in our trenches, expecting every moment the storm would break in all its fury upon us, we worshipped God. Christ in the Camp by J. William Jones, and The Great Revival in the Southern Armies by W. W.

Bennett, it will amaze you how those men sat on logs and on the dirt, finishing their prayers and listening to preaching while cannon were exploding around them. Unbelievable. He said, “We worship God in our trenches.” In other words, when they could not get out, it did not stop or hinder them. They continued to worship God.

In another instance, during a skirmish, some men were ordered to the front as sharpshooters and directed to lie on the ground, loading and firing as rapidly as possible. After a short time, one soldier’s ammunition was expended. Though his position was already very dangerous, it would have been certain death to procure a fresh supply. An eyewitness reported that the soldier drew his Bible from his pocket and, while balls were whizzing about him and cutting the grass at his side, quietly read its precious pages for a few minutes and then closed his eyes in prayer.

Lying on the ground with men shooting everywhere, unable to rise and obtain more ammunition, what did the soldier do? He pulled out his Bible, read it, and prayed. I have news for you folks: I do not believe I would have waited to pray until I ran out of ammunition. I would have been praying before. Yet he simply lay there and prayed. Such composure and contentment can only be found in Jesus Christ.

Means and Workers of the Revival

There were many great helps in the revivals that swept the Confederate armies. There were colporteurs—men who distributed books, tracts, and papers—and hospital workers; many men were converted in the hospital. There were officers. John Gordon of Georgia, one of the most godly men, led a number of his men to Jesus Christ. General Gordon, General Lee, General Jackson, General Ewell, and other men did everything they could to promote the revival in the armies. There were missionaries, godly officers, and godly men in the ranks, but the brunt of the work fell upon the chaplains. Many of these chaplains labored under strenuous loads.

Some of these men only preached, prayed, counseled, and helped heal, but they also fought. As I read and study, I see a parallel. During the American Revolution, preachers were hated and despised by the British; likewise, Southern preachers were hated and despised by Northerners. The reason was that they regarded these pastors as instruments in keeping up the spirit of resistance and rebellion, as they called it.

One Yankee critic said, and I am quoting now, that "the most unmitigated set of villains they have in the South are the Methodists, the Baptists, the Presbyterian, and the Episcopalian preachers all talking secession, drinking mean liquor, and advocating the cause of Jeff Davis and the devil." Isn't that amazing? The most unmitigated set of villains in the South were the preachers.

It was Chaplain T. D. Witherspoon of the 42nd Mississippi Regiment, captured at Gettysburg. The only reason he was captured was that he would not leave the sick, wounded, and dying. Yankee Colonel Fish ordered the chaplain thrown into a dark underground dungeon where drunken soldiers and deserters were. When the lieutenant received the order, he protested, saying, "But sir, this man is a minister of the gospel. You won't send him there." Colonel Fish shot back, "Why not? The preachers are more to blame for this war than any others. The best thing we could do would be to hang a few of them when we capture them."

Very obviously, the North did not care too much for the Southern pastors. Regardless of the dangers, many chaplains believed it was

their place to be in the front lines with the men to whom they were ministering.

Chaplain I. T. Tichenor of the 17th Alabama Regiment gave this report on the Battle of Shiloh:

“During this engagement, we were under a crossfire on the left wing from three directions. Under it, the boys wavered. I had been wearied and was sitting down, but seeing them waver, I sprang to my feet, took off my hat, waved it over my head, walked up and down the line, and they said, preach them a sermon. I reminded them that it was Sunday, that at that hour, 11:30, all their home folks were praying for them, that Tom Watts, governor and former regimental commander, had told us he would listen with an eager ear to hear from the 17th. And shouting his name over the loud roar of the battle, I called upon them to stand there and die if need be for their country. The effect was evident. Every man stood to his post, every eye flashed, every heart beat high with desperate resolve to conquer or die.”

Significantly, Chaplain Tichenor added, “The regiment had, after the battle was over, thirteen killed, 117 wounded or missing, but the dead of the enemy that lay in front of it was 352.”

The chaplain did not add that which appeared in the newspaper account: that he himself fought with the coolness and courage of a veteran, killing a Yankee colonel, a major, and four privates. Chaplain Tichenor then picked up a rifle and fought as well. Chaplain L. W. Allen said, "My speech to my men in the presence of the enemy is this: They're the Yankees, boys. Our cause is just. Trust in God and charge them." He was certainly trying to encourage them.

These chaplains were Presbyterian, Baptist, Episcopalian, and of other denominations, but they understood the necessity of standing and working together on key issues. Unlike most pastors today, they did not attack each other; they worked together and were glad to see the others prosper, even when they themselves were not prospering. That which bound them together was the Word of God and the doctrines of grace.

Interdenominational Cooperation and Gospel Preaching

Dr. William J. Hoge wrote of his visit to Fredericksburg in the spring of 1863, during the revival in Barksdale's Mississippi Regiment: "The Reverend Dr. Burrows of the First Baptist Church, Richmond, was to have preached that night. But as he would remain some days, and I could only stay a day, he courteously insisted on my preaching. And so we had a Presbyterian sermon introduced by Baptist services under the direction of a Methodist chaplain in an Episcopal church."

Where else could such camaraderie be found? Such camaraderie could not possibly exist today because of the fractured nature of the Church and the abysmal ignorance of theology. Although these men differed denominationally, their theology was basically the same. They not only worked together, but also aided each other in placing new converts. When Presbyterian pastor Beverly Tucker Lacy had converts who insisted on immersion as the proper mode of baptism, he immediately contacted a Baptist chaplain, Brother Webb, who eagerly came and baptized them.

Afterward, Brother Webb said to Dr. Lacy, "Brother Lacy, you remind me of a hen setting on duck eggs. She carefully nurses the eggs until the little ducks appear and diligently watches over and cares for them. But someday she goes near the water, and the whole brood of little ducks plunge in while she has to stand clucking on the bank." "Yes," said Brother Lacy, "I cannot follow them in, but I go with them to the water's edge.

“I receive them with open arms when they come out, and I am ever ready to hail them as my spiritual children and do all in my power to help them serve our common Master and reach the home of our common Father above.” Here was a Presbyterian willing to help the Baptist, and the Baptist willing to help the Presbyterian.

Again, Pastor Lacy wrote to the Central Presbyterian from the Army of Northern Virginia: “Since the arrival of the Army at its present location, about a thousand have professed faith in Christ and more than 2,000 are earnestly inquiring in the way of salvation.” In one little encampment, over 1,000 had been converted, and 2,000 were seeking Christ.

Another chaplain reported that in the Second and Third Corps alone, men were being converted at the rate of 200 per week. He said that the work was widening and deepening so far as man could judge. The chaplain was correct in his judgment.

A. E. Dickinson of Richmond, Virginia, wrote: “I wish all the members of our churches could be here and hear how fervently the soldiers pray that the revival of religion in the army may reach the churches at home, that their brethren at home may be turned from the sins of extortion and speculation, and that all may be brought to humble themselves before God.” Here were soldiers in desperate situations praying that God would send the revival to the churches at home.

Dr. W. W. Bennett, in his book The Great Revival of the Southern Armies, written in 1876, estimated, based upon firsthand accounts and the records of the Chaplains Association, that approximately 150,000 men were converted during the course of the war. No wonder it took four long years to whip the South. These men were fighting not merely to protect their homes and lands, but from biblical principles and for truth, righteousness, and justice. What type of men preached to the soldiers? It was not the lazy, indolent, effeminate type.

There may have been a few who went there temporarily, but they were sent packing very quickly. J. William Jones, who classified himself as the army evangelist and was trying to get more men to fill chaplain vacancies, wrote: "Send us the names of good men. And here I repeat, we want none others. Our object being not merely to fill up the regiments with nominal chaplains, but to fill the vacancies with efficient working men. We want effective gospel preachers whose burden shall be Christ and Him crucified.

"It is a common mistake that anybody will do to preach to soldiers. The great business of the chaplain is to preach Christ publicly and from tent to tent, and the temporal welfare of soldiers should be made subordinate to this. We want men physically able as well as willing to endure hardships and privations.

"If a chaplain would live up to the full measure of his usefulness, he must be with his regiment on the weary march, frequently

resigning his horse to some foot-sore soldier; lie with them around the bivouac fire after evening prayers; be drenched on the outpost or face the pelting snowstorm; divide with some hungry soldier his last hard cracker; or, in a word, share with his regiment whatever hardships they may be called to endure. If a brother is not physically able to endure these hardships, he had best not enter the work. But there is no question that many a delicate brother would have his health permanently improved if he would thus learn to endure hardness as a good soldier."

In other words, "Don't send us any namby-pamby, sickly, weakling, effeminate, wimpy men. We don't want them! And they won't last." It was straight gospel preaching that God used to awaken these men's need of Jesus Christ. The preaching of the law awakened them to their sins, and the preaching of the gospel gave them the remedy. They preached justification by faith alone and the atonement of Jesus Christ.

These things answered their cry, "What must I do to be saved?" The old Puritans used to say that the sharp needle of the law must precede the scarlet thread of the gospel. That is exactly what happened: they preached the law, demonstrated that the men were sinners, and then preached Christ as the only answer for sin. They did so in power, humility, and faith.

The Need for Courageous Preachers Today

And God honored that preaching, raising up a generation of courageous, godly heroes. Let me submit something to you today: one of our leading problems in this day and age is our lack of real, genuine, saved, sanctified, Holy Spirit-filled pastors and teachers to teach us the Word of God. Would to God there were men today—preachers, I am talking about—as there were in the 1860s, who knew the Word of God, applied the Word of God, and were willing to fight for truth, not just spiritually but physically, if necessary.

God does not use wimpy preachers. That is a fact. Watch the TV preachers: I get so sick of the sweet, syrupy smile and the sentimentalism. I cannot hack it; I cannot handle it. Do you remember when little Samuel started coming to Bethlehem,

Bethlehem Judah? They sent men out to meet the preacher, and asked him, “Comest thou peaceably?” When was the last time a city council sent to a preacher who was about to enter, “Are you coming peacefully, preacher?” The elders asked Samuel that because, in 1 Samuel 15, he had taken a sword and hacked Agag to pieces. They thought, “He might be coming to do that to some of us. We had better check and see whether he is coming peacefully.” You will read this in 1 Samuel 16.

We have men today in the pulpits who are ashamed of the gospel of Jesus Christ, ashamed of the Word of God. Our Lord said plainly in 1 Samuel 2:30, "Them that honor Me will I honor, saith the Lord, and those that despise Me shall be lightly esteemed." You know what our Lord said in Mark 8:38? "Whosoever shall be ashamed of Me and My words, in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him also shall the Son of Man be ashamed when He cometh in the glory of His Father with His holy angels." Our Lord said, if you are ashamed of Me, I am going to be ashamed of you. I get frustrated at the opportunities a number of these preachers have when they are on television. They are asked about the storms or about whatever, and they give some little wimpy answer instead of quoting the Scripture.

The reason we are in the trouble we are in today in America is that we do not have men who will preach the whole counsel of God. I suppose there could be no greater compliment to the men of the South than that given by a Yankee chaplain speaking to his regiment about the state of religion among the Southern troops. Listen to what he said:

"You may call this fanaticism, enthusiasm, or what you will, but remember you are fighting an enemy that comes from the closet to the battlefield, that comes from its knees in prayer to engage in deadly strife, that comes in the belief that its battles are the battles of Jehovah, that His smile is resting upon its banner and will ensure success. What power to make every man a hero and every hero, if need be, a martyr."

Did you hear what he said? You are fighting men who come from their prayer closets and from their knees, who believe that their cause is just. They have the blessing and power of God upon them. They are courageous, ready to fight, and willing to die. That power

will make every one of them a hero and, if necessary, make every hero a martyr.

He will give his life for truth. Do you realize that even those who fought against us recognized the power of Christianity and the Word of God? How can we be so blind and ignorant? Should we not remember that what once made us great as a nation, a people, and a culture was the Word of God and the worship of Jesus Christ? I keep telling people this over and over.

We will never reclaim our heritage, history, or culture until we return to the foundation upon which they were built. That foundation is the Word of God.

Conclusion: A Prayer for God to 'Do It Again'

In Psalm 44, we see what the prayer is really about: “We have heard with our ears, O God, our fathers have told us what work Thou didst in their days and times of old.” They had heard the mighty stories of God’s providential deliverance, His power, and His blessings. Specifically, verse 2 says, “How Thou didst drive out the heathen with Thine hand and plantedst them. How Thou didst afflict the people and cast them out.” It was God’s sovereign providence that drove out the heathen and gave them the land. “For they got not that land in possession by their own sword, neither did their own arm save them, but Thy right hand and Thine arm and the light of Thy countenance, because Thou hadst a favor to them.”

Did not the children of Israel fight? Of course they fought. But verse 3 teaches that it was not their power or might; it was God blessing them and giving them the victory. Although they fought, they knew it was not their ability but God’s ability. Then verse 4 says, “Thou art my King, O God. Command deliverances for Jacob.”

What is he saying? God, we have heard all that You did in time past for Your people. You have not changed. You are still our King. Command deliverances for Jacob. God, You have done it in time past—do it again! That is what we need to cry: Do it again, O Lord.

Then he says, “Through Thee, we will push down our enemies. Through Thy name, we will tread them under that rise up against us. For I will not trust in my bow. Neither shall my sword save me, but

Thou hast saved us from our enemies, and hast put them to shame that hated us. In God we boast all the day long." God, do it again. "Thou art my King, O God. Command deliverances for Jacob." Can we not cry, "Thou art my King, O God. Command deliverances for Thy people in America. Command deliverances for Thy people in the South"?

Father, we bow before Thee this day. We have heard with our ears some of the great things Thou didst in times past. We know that Thou dost not change. Thou art the immutable, sovereign God of heaven and earth. Lord, enable us to humble ourselves under Thy hand and Thy mighty power, that we might cry, "Do it again, O Lord. Command deliverances for Thy people." Give us Your grace, mercy, and power. In the name of Jesus Christ we ask and pray, Amen.

CHAPTER 3

The Purpose of Scripture

Introduction and Reading of 2 Timothy 3:15-17

Alright, well let's open our Bibles today, if you would please, to 2 Timothy chapter 3. 2 Timothy chapter 3. And I want us to begin reading at verse 15 and read through verse 17. 2 Timothy chapter 3, verse 15 through 17. The message today is entitled, "The Purpose of Scripture." The Purpose of Scripture. 2 Timothy 3, verse 15, Paul writes Timothy, and he says that from a child thou hast known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith, which is in Christ Jesus.

All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works. Have you ever wondered why we have the Word of God? Have you ever thought about what exactly is the purpose of Scripture? Why did God reveal His Word to us?

General Revelation: Creation and Conscience

Now, there are several very general answers to that question. One of those answers could be found in Deuteronomy 29:29. I'll quote it for you. You don't have to turn there. Listen carefully to what God says, Deuteronomy 29:29, "The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but those things which are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law." Now, very obviously, generally speaking, one of the reasons God revealed His Word for us is that we may know His will and that we may do that will. So you can give a number of general answers to that question. But in order to comprehend and understand the greatness and the importance of Scripture, you must consider the fact that the Word of God is classified as special revelation. Now, special revelation differs from general revelation.

You can pick up any theological book you want to pick up, and it will talk about general revelation and special revelation. When you talk about general revelation, you're normally talking about creation and conscience. In other words, there are certain things that you can know about God just from creation and just from conscience. For instance, if you will turn in your Bibles—hold 2 Timothy—but turn to Psalm 19, and begin reading there verse 1, and from Psalm 19 we'll go to Romans chapter 1. But look at Psalm 19, and let's begin reading there verse 1 and show you general creation, or general revelation, which is revealed in creation. Notice Psalm 19 verse 1: "The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament showeth his handiwork."

“Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night showeth knowledge. There is no speech nor language where their voice is not heard.” It does not matter whether you are in South America, Africa, or Asia; wherever you are, God’s creation is speaking, saying, “Yes, there is a God.” “Their line is gone out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world.”

“In them hath he set a tabernacle for the sun, which is as a bridegroom coming out of his chamber, and rejoiceth as a strong man to run a race. His going forth is from the end of the heaven, and his circuit unto the ends of it: and there is nothing hid from the heat thereof.” Here the Bible is speaking about creation as a general

revelation. It does not matter who you are or where you are. You can look at creation and deduce, “Yes, there must be a Creator. There must be a God who is all-powerful to create the universe or to create the world.”

Now notice Romans 1:18–20, concerning creation: “For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness;” and notice this: “because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath showed it unto them. For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead.”

“So that they are without excuse.” Creation light is enough to render all men without excuse. Simply look at creation, and you may know that there is a God.

General revelation may tell you that there is a God, and that He is powerful and righteous, but it does not tell you anything about God’s mercy and grace, nor the grounds upon which God will be merciful to sinners. Creation light is enough to condemn you, but it is not enough to convert you. It renders all men inexcusable, because you can look at creation and know that there is a God.

Likewise, you have conscience. Conscience is also known as general revelation. Romans 2:12 says, "For as many as have sinned without the law shall also perish without the law: and as many as have sinned in the law shall be judged by the law; (for not the hearers of the law are just before God, but the doers of the law shall be justified. For when the Gentiles," or the heathen, "which have not the law do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves: which show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the meanwhile accusing or else excusing one another."

Not all men had the law given to them as Israel had. The heathen did not receive the revealed Word as Israel did, nor the written law. Yet God is telling us that there is in all men what is known as semen

religionis—that all men have innate knowledge: "Yes, there is a God," and, "Yes, there is a right and wrong."

Once again, conscience is not enough to convert you, but it is enough to condemn you. You can go to the darkest continent of Africa, to the village that has never heard the Word of God and never seen a Bible, and let one of those men murder his neighbor. You know what the other villagers will do? They will probably take him, stake him out on an ant bed somewhere, pour syrup on him, and let the ants eat him. Why? They know that murder is wrong.

Does that mean that they are Christians? No, not by any stretch of the imagination. Conscience, whether you are in an uncivilized world or a civilized world like we are, quote unquote, has enough knowledge to condemn you, but certainly not enough knowledge to convert you. This is known as general revelation. Now, let me just say this about the conscience.

Special Revelation: The Written Word and the Living Word

Everyone has heard this old adage: “Let your conscience be your guide.” You better not. You better not. According to the Bible, the conscience is not only ignorant; it can be wrongly taught, defiled, or seared. You must never ever allow your conscience to be your guide. You always must allow the Word of God to be your guide. The Word of God alone is our standard for faith and practice.

There are two aspects of special revelation. We have been talking about general revelation, and that deals with creation and conscience. Special revelation deals with commandments and Christ. In other words, there is the general and there is the special. One aspect of special revelation is the written Word of God, which we read about in 2 Timothy 3:16: “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God.” But then there is the aspect of the living Word of God.

Jesus Christ is referred to as the Word. John 1:1 says, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made.” Jesus Christ is referred to as the Word of God. Verse 14 says,

“And the Word,” that is, Jesus Christ, “was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.” So, the Bible is the written Word, and Jesus Christ is the living Word.

Since you understand that the Bible is the written Word and Jesus Christ is the living Word, please understand this: it is impossible for you to have one attitude toward the Bible and a different attitude toward Christ. Or you could reverse it. It is impossible for you to have one attitude toward Christ and a different attitude toward the Bible. I have heard people during my lifetime say, “Well, I believe Christ, but I don’t believe all the Bible,” or, “I believe the Bible, but I don’t believe in Christ.” That is impossible. It is impossible. Why? Because they are inseparable. They are so inseparable that Jesus Christ said to the unbelieving Jews in John 5:46, listen carefully.

He said, "For had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed me: for he wrote of me." If you believe the written Word, you would have believed the living Word. John told them, "Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me."

Those unbelieving Jews were rejecting Christ. He said, "Search the scriptures; for they are they which testify of me." So you have the written Word, and you have the living Word. In Luke 24:27, when Christ was walking with those men on the Emmaus road, the Bible says, "And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself." Everything in the Bible speaks about Christ. The written Word speaks of Christ, the Living Word. The written Word bears record that Jesus Christ is indeed the Son of God, the Savior of the world, and the Only Begotten of the Father.

The written Word is God's inspired Word, and Jesus Christ is the Living Word. You cannot have one attitude toward the Bible and a different one toward Christ, or one attitude toward Christ and a different one toward the Bible. Christ Himself puts them both together in John 12:48: "He that rejecteth me," that is the living Word, "and receiveth not my words," that is the written Word, "hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day." Christ says that the one who rejects the

living Word and receives not the written Word has one that judges him in the last day, even the word which He has spoken.

Men are going to be judged from the written Word, because the written Word testifies of Christ, the living Word. When the living Word testifies against them, it is the same thing as the written Word testifying against them. The written Word gives testimony to Christ, the living Word.

In 2 Timothy chapter 3, notice verse 16: “All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.” Before considering the purpose of Scripture, concentrate on the phrase, “All scripture is given by inspiration of God.” When the Bible says “all Scripture,” it refers to every word, every chapter, and every book. It refers to Scripture as a whole. The whole, complete, and total writing of Scripture is given by inspiration. There is no part of Scripture that is not inspired.

The Inspiration of Scripture

Obviously, when the Apostle Paul spoke these words in 2 Timothy 3:16, he had reference mainly to the Old Testament, because the New Testament had not been completed at that time. Of course, this would also apply to those New Testament writings that were extant at that time, or in existence at that time. Paul probably had written several other books prior to 2 Timothy. In fact, many say that 1 Thessalonians was the first book that he wrote. Some of the other apostles may have written some things too. This would apply equally to that which had been written by the inspired apostles, but primarily he was speaking of the Old Testament.

The Old Testament is just as inspired as the New Testament, and there is no ground for despising or disparaging it. The Old Testament is equally the Word of God as the New Testament. Most of us have heard the old adage: “The new is in the old concealed, and the old is in the new revealed.” That is true: the New Testament is concealed in the Old, and the Old Testament is revealed in the New. Let me tell you very dogmatically and emphatically: you cannot understand either the Old Testament or the New Testament without the other. They go together.

They complement each other; they complete each other. We do not have two Bibles. We have one Bible. Albert Barnes, when commenting on 2 Timothy 3:16, says that this properly refers to the Old Testament. Certainly it does apply to the Old Testament. But Paul said, “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God.” That certainly includes all Scripture, Old and New Testament alike.

When Paul said that all Scripture is given by inspiration of God, let me take a moment to explain inspiration. You should ask yourselves, What is inspiration? If God says all Scripture is inspired of God, what is inspiration?

Here is a definition of inspiration: Inspiration is the strong, conscious in-breathing of God into men, qualifying them to give utterance to the truth. It is God speaking through men, so much so that the words they spoke and wrote were, and are indeed, the very words of God Himself. Inspiration means that these are God's words, just as if God spoke them with His own mouth.

That is why this is important. Through the years, when I have been teaching something or making a comment from Scripture, I have heard people say, “Well, preacher, if I heard God say that, I'd believe it.” If it comes out of this Bible, God said it. That is what inspiration is all about: these are God's words. God spoke these words; God said these words.

The interesting thing is that the word “inspired” in the Greek is the word theopneustos, and it literally means “God-breathed” or “God-exhaled.” God exhaled, or spoke, the words through His mouth. That is what inspiration is all about. Now you understand why Paul said all Scripture is given by inspiration and is profitable. If God breathed out His words, if these were and are indeed the very words of God Himself, they have to be profitable. Interestingly enough, the word “profitable” is ophelimos in the Greek, and it is translated “profitable” not only here, but also in 1 Timothy 4:8 and Titus 3:8.

The Purpose of Scripture

Scripture is for our benefit. Listen again to what Barnes said, commenting on profitable: “It is useful. It is adapted to give

instruction, to administer reproof. If all Scripture is thus valuable, then we are to esteem no part of the Old Testament as worthless. There is no portion of it, even now, which may not be fitted in certain circumstances to furnish us valuable lessons, and consequently, no part of it which could be spared from the sacred canon. There is no part of the human body which is not useful in its place, and no part of it which can be spared without sensible loss." And that is a fact.

Can you spare an arm? Can you spare a leg? Can you spare a kidney? Every part of your body is needed, and if you lose a part of it, there is a sensible loss. Likewise, every part of the Bible is inspired and useful. Now let us get to the crux of the matter and answer the question.

Purpose 1: Wisdom unto Salvation

What is the purpose of Scripture? Why did God give us the Scriptures? Let us begin with verse 15 of 2 Timothy chapter 3. Paul writes to Timothy that "from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus." The very first reason we have the Scriptures, the very first purpose, is that they have the wisdom of salvation.

Please note what Paul said in verse 15: "And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus." It is important to note that salvation, real, genuine, true salvation, is revealed only in the Bible. Paul told Timothy, "From a child thou hast known the Holy Scriptures which are able to make thee wise unto salvation." You may study all the religious books of the world, memorize them, quote them, enjoy them, and relish them, but only the Bible, only God's Word, teaches us God's salvation. Salvation is not to be found in any other book than the Word of God. It is the Bible that is particularly suited to convey salvation, God's salvation.

You can take the book from the beginning, the book of Genesis, to the end, the book of Revelation, and all in between speaks of salvation by grace through faith through Jesus Christ alone. It is the Bible that tells us about our sin and our rebellion. It is the Bible that

teaches us about God's grace and God's mercy in sending His only begotten Son as our substitute and as our sacrifice.

In all the other religions, salvation is something that you accomplish. Salvation is something that you work to receive. Only in the Bible is salvation something that God has done through Jesus Christ. Only in the Bible do you have an accomplished and a finished salvation. You remember what Jesus Christ said in John 19, verse 30? He said, "It is finished." And when He said, "It is finished," He declared an accomplished salvation. It is something that God has done through Jesus Christ.

It was Christ who propitiated the wrath of God. It was Christ who magnified God's law and made it honorable. It was Christ who satisfied the holiness of God. It was Christ who sacrificed Himself for our sins. It is finished. All the other religions spell theirs with two letters, D-O. Only in the Bible do Christians spell ours, D-O-N-E, done. It is finished through Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ actually accomplished and worked out God's salvation. That's why the Bible says in 1 John 4 and verse 10, "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins."

Do you realize it is Christ alone who reveals the Father? In John 1, verse 18, our Lord said, "No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him." In Matthew 11, verse 27, our Lord said it like this: "All things are delivered unto me of my Father: and no man knoweth the Son, but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him." Salvation is in Jesus Christ alone. Peter therefore rightly and correctly preached in Acts 4, verse 12, "Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved."

Why in the world do we have the life, the conduct, the miracles, and the obedience of Jesus Christ recorded in the Bible? Why did John even write the book of John? John 20, verse 30, says, "And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book." Christ performed many miracles that were not recorded. But verse 31 says, "But these are written, that

ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name."

Why then did God give us the Scriptures? First of all, to make us wise unto salvation. Why did He record all these things about Christ in the Bible, especially the book of John? That we might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God.

Paul told Timothy, “And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures.” It is a sad state of affairs in this age of enlightenment, in our civilized society, and in our educated and enlightened academics and academia, that we are so totally ignorant of the Word of God. Timothy knew the Scriptures from a child. Most adults do not know the Scriptures. Most professing Christian adults have never even read the Bible all the way through one time. Yet Timothy knew the Scriptures from a child.

Do you want to know why there are so many different religions, cults, isms, and systems? Because of ignorance of the Word of God. Paul the Apostle said it like this in Romans 10:3: “For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God.” When you are ignorant of God's righteousness and God's salvation, you go about to establish your own.

That is why most professing Christians get angry, upset, and downright mad when they hear the Word of God preached in its purity and clarity. The only salvation most people have is that of their own making and not of God, and they are threatened when they find out that their salvation will not work.

He said, “From a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation.” If you wish to die in your sins, ignore the Word of God. If you wish to discover God's salvation, study the Word of God, because it is the Word of God that will make us wise unto salvation. That is the purpose of Scripture.

Purpose 2: Knowledge of Maturation

Secondly, verse 16 says, “All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for

instruction in righteousness." So now we have another purpose: the knowledge of maturation. All Scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable. Profitable for what? It is profitable for maturing us in the faith once we have been saved by grace through faith.

One of the real problems in the average Bible-believing church is that most preachers—and, unhappily, many Christians—often speak and preach as if there were nothing else to Christianity other than salvation. I am not talking about the liberals now; this is a real problem in the average Bible-believing church. Over the years, many Christians have told me how dissatisfied they were with their churches. They said, "Preacher, our pastor preaches salvation Sunday after Sunday after Sunday. I've been saved for twenty years, and I'd like to know something more than just being saved."

The Word of God was given not just for wisdom unto salvation, but also for the knowledge of maturation. In other words, once you have been saved, God designs and desires that you be a mature Christian.

Do you know what Paul told those Ephesian elders, those Ephesian preachers, in Acts chapter 20 and verse 32? Paul was talking to preachers. "And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified." Paul commended them to God and to the Word of His grace, which is able to build them up. If you want to be edified, strengthened, and built up in the faith, you must have the Word of God. It is the Word of God that will edify you.

Look in your Bibles. Hold 2 Timothy, but turn right over, if you would, to 2 Peter chapter 1 and verse 3. I want you to note this statement. I will read this passage a little bit later on, but notice 2 Peter chapter 1 and verse 3. After Peter gives a salutation in verses 1 and 2, he makes this statement: "According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue." Pay close attention to that. God, according to His divine power, has given us all things that pertain unto life and godliness through the knowledge of Him. Where do we get the knowledge of God? In the

Bible. What does the Bible give us? All things that pertain unto life and godliness. We have what we need in the Word of God.

Paul tells us in Colossians 1:28 three things that we need to be mature Christians: “Whom we preach, warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom; that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus.” Notice the three things. First, “whom we preach.” Second, “warning every man.” Third, “teaching every man.” You need preaching, admonition, and teaching. Therefore, the Apostle Paul says that we need preaching, admonition, and teaching to bring us to maturity in the faith. This identifies the means God uses to bring every man to maturity and to present every man perfect in Christ Jesus. Since we know the Word of God has been given to build us up, let us look specifically at how the Word of God is designed to build us up in 2 Timothy chapter 3.

Notice 2 Timothy 3:16: “All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine.” First, the purpose of the Word of God for maturation is to teach us doctrine.

The Greek word for doctrine is didaskalia, meaning doctrine, teaching, instruction, or precept. The Word of God is designed to give us instruction. John Calvin said, “Here he enters into a detailed statement of the various and manifold advantages derived from the Scriptures, and first of all he mentions instruction or doctrine, which ranks above all the rest. For it will be of no purpose that you exhort or reprove if you've not been previously instructed. But because instruction taken by itself is often of little avail, he adds reproof and correction.”

In other words, we need all of it. The purpose of Scripture is to give us doctrine or instruction. When considering doctrine, we must consider the grand and glorious doctrines of God: His being, His perfections, His sovereignty, the creation and fall of man, the person and office of Christ, redemption by Christ, justification by faith, pardon by His blood, reconciliation, atonement by His sacrifice, and eternal life for Him. All of these are doctrines.

I get frustrated when I hear preachers and Christians say, “I just don't like all that heavy doctrine stuff.” You cannot teach without teaching doctrine. You are either teaching the doctrine of God or the

doctrine of man. Period. All instruction is doctrine. God gave us His Word that we may know true, right, and accurate doctrine. Everything we need to know about God, man and the fall of man, salvation, justification by faith, regeneration, conversion, and eternity is revealed in the Word of God. If we study it, we will have right doctrine.

We would be rightly instructed in the precepts of Scripture. But the Lord did not give us the Scripture just for doctrine alone. Doctrine is first and foremost. It is needed and absolutely necessary. But look in verse 16. He says, "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine," and then he says, "for reproof." How many of us like to be reproved?

The Greek word for reproof is elegchos, and it literally refers to reproof or conviction. When we talk about conviction, we talk about being either convicted of the truth or sometimes being convicted of sin. The Word of God will convince us either of truth, that we may believe it without any hesitation, or it will convict us of sin, that we may be humbled for it without any extenuation. Usually the word reproof or convict is used to convict us of the error of our ways. When we are sinning, when we are obstinate, when we are obdurate, and when we are apathetic, the Word of God will convict us.

I do not know if you have come to this realization yet, and it may surprise some of you, or even shock a few of you, to learn that none of us are yet perfect. We have to be reproved. We have to be gotten to. We have to be convicted. When you and I do things carelessly, when we sin through ignorance, or when we sin with deliberation, we need to be reproved. We need to be convicted. We need to be brought into account to the Word of God.

Dwight L. Moody, as I told you in times past, had a little motto written in the flyleaf of his Bible. What he had written was very true and very accurate: "Either this book will keep you from sin, or sin will keep you from this book." When Christians begin sinning and begin disobeying, one of the first things they do

Some slow down in their attendance to hear the preaching of the Word, and sometimes they miss it altogether. Why? Because the Word of God will convict you. When people determine that they are

going to have their sin rather than the Word of God, they stay away from where they are made uncomfortable. It is just that simple. You cannot have the Word of God and your sin.

The Word of God will convict us. He said it is given to us for doctrine and for reproof. But notice the third reason it is given: for correction. If we are going to be mature in the faith, we need not only doctrine and reproof; we also need correction. The word correction here is a very interesting word in the Greek: epanorthosis. It literally means to make straight, to make erect, to rear up again, and to build anew.

It is used in the correction of a deformed person, such as in Luke chapter 13 and verse 13, when our Lord healed the woman with her infirmity. The Bible says, “And immediately she was made straight, and glorified God.” Here was a woman crippled over, and when He healed her, He made her straight. The same word is used in Hebrews 12 and verse 13: “And make straight paths for your feet, lest that which is lame be turned out of the way; but let it rather be healed.” When he talks about correction, he is talking about making something straight—starting over and making it anew.

Look in your Bible at Galatians chapter 6 and verse 1: “Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted.” Let us work this out. Suppose Dr. Bowen falls into a grievous sin. What are we to do as Christian brethren? We are to seek to restore him. But do we restore him by saying, “Oh, look what he did. I would never do that”? No. God says to restore him while considering yourself, lest you also be tempted. In other words, it is only by the grace of God that you did not do what he did. He says, “Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one.” Now the word “restore”

The word literally means to render fit, to render sound, to render complete. It has the idea of mending or setting straight that which has been broken. So when things are wrong, broken, or out of joint in our lives, they may be corrected by the Word of God. When I was a boy, Goodman's Welding Shop, which is still in existence, had a big sign painted on it: "We mend everything but a broken heart."

But the Word of God can even mend the broken heart. It can mend the broken heart and everything else.

Look back in your Bibles to 2 Timothy chapter 3 and verse 16, and think about it in light of Galatians 6 and verse 1. Paul said, "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine"—that is, it is going to instruct us—"for reproof"—it is going to rebuke us and convict us.

It is going to slap us down. Then the next thing is correction. Notice this: the same word that slaps us down is the same word that picks us up, sets our broken bones, and puts us on the right path. Reproof and correction go together. God never just slaps us down. He might slap us down, but He does so, if we are His, to pick us up, straighten us out, put us on the path.

Everyone knows the story about the shepherd and the sheep. When a shepherd has a sheep that constantly and continually goes astray, he will catch that sheep, take his staff, and break the sheep's leg. Then he sets the broken leg. Now the sheep has to stay with the shepherd. So the same word that breaks us is the same word that lifts us up, straightens us out, and keeps us right with the shepherd.

Notice verse 16 again: "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction." Then he says, "for instruction in righteousness." The purpose of the Word of God is not only to give us the wisdom of salvation, but the knowledge of maturation. If we are going to mature, we have to have doctrine, reproof, correction, and instruction in righteousness.

The word for instruction is the Greek word paideia, which means child training. God gives us child training in instruction. Paideia refers to the whole training and education of children: the cultivation of the mind, the cultivation of morals, and the cultivation of everything in their lives. It teaches them to obey. Child training not only includes reproof, but also chastisement.

Hebrews 12:11 says, “Now no chastening” — or no child training — “for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous; nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby.” Every time you see the word

“chastise,” “chasten,” or “chastisement,” it is the Greek word paideia, which means child training.

I never jumped up and down and thanked God when I was a boy that I got the stuffing beat out of me by my father. Did you? However, I thank God several times since then that he whipped me and chastised me. I have concluded, Joe, that I never got half of what I deserved. He probably should have whipped me a whole lot more than he did. I am thankful that he did now, but I was not happy when he did it then.

The Bible tells us that when God whips us, when God chastens us, the result is that it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them who were exercised thereby. Let me spell it out: God's chastening always works. His never fails.

I have heard parents look at their children when they are acting up and say, “Well, kiddo, you're cruising for a bruising,” or, “If you keep it up, you're going to get it.” God could say the same thing to us when we are acting unbiblically, unscripturally, and ungodly: “Well, child, you're cruising for a bruising. You keep it up, I'm going to whip you.” But God says that when He gets through whipping us, first, we will know we have been whipped, and second, it will work.

It will yield the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto those who are exercised thereby. What is the joy of a parent's heart? In the book of Proverbs, we read, “A wise son maketh a glad father,” and, “A wise son is a joy to his mother.” A parent rejoices when a child, after being brought up and chastened to teach him what is right, becomes mature. He no longer has to be whipped or made to do what is right; he does what is right because he understands it, loves to do it, and wants to be an honor to his parents.

Maturity in the faith is the same way. We know that we are mature when God does not have to make us or threaten us. We want to do what is right, please Him, honor Him, and express our love and thanksgiving to Him. We no longer need the rod to motivate us. We are mature, and that is why the Word of God is given: that we might have child training in righteousness and reach the stage where we do what is right because it is right to do what is right.

Purpose 3: Consummate Qualification

One last thing: look in verse 17. Here is the third purpose, the consummate qualification. God gave us His Scripture not only to make us wise unto salvation and not only to give us the knowledge of maturation, but also that we may have a consummate qualification. If verses 15 and 16 have been applied to our lives, we come to verse 17: "That the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works." Why should we be perfect? "Perfect" refers to maturity. Why should we be thoroughly furnished unto every good work?

I told you earlier that I was going to repeat 2 Peter 1 in verse 3. Listen carefully: "According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue." Why should we be consummately qualified as Christians and as Christian workers? Because God has given us everything we need to make us mature and complete, and to qualify us to worship Him, honor Him, and serve Him. We do not need anything else.

The Greek word for "perfect" is artios, and it refers to that which is well-fitted, complete, or perfect. It also refers to that which has been given a special aptitude for. In other words, God, in maturing us, gives us a special aptitude to worship Him, honor Him, love Him, and serve Him. The words "throughly furnished" come from the Greek word exartizo, which means to be completely or totally furnished, missing nothing.

Albert Barnes says, "The object is not merely to convince and to convert him, it is to furnish all the instruction needful for his entire perfection. The idea here is not that anyone is absolutely perfect, but that the Scriptures have laid down the way which leads to perfection, and if anyone were perfect, he would find in the Scriptures all the instructions he needed for those circumstances."

"There is no deficiency in the Bible for man in any of the situations in which he may be placed in life. And the whole tendency of the book is to make him who will put himself fairly under its instruction absolutely perfect." If you want to be more holy, more

mature, and more perfect, you must put yourself under the Scripture.

Calvin says, “Perfect here means a blameless person, one in whom there is nothing defective, for he asserts absolutely the Scripture is sufficient for perfection. Accordingly, he who is not satisfied with Scripture desires to be wiser than is either proper or desirable.” Scriptures are sufficient.

They are our rule for faith and practice. If you are not satisfied with Scripture, Calvin says, "You desire what is neither right, proper, or desirable." Matthew Poole said, "Thoroughly furnished unto all good works, and be prepared to every work which is good and acceptable and well pleasing unto God, whether it be a work of piety or justice or charity." The Scripture, as to all, is so full of direction that Christians need not go down to the Philistines to wet their tools, nor be beholden to unwritten traditions or the writings of pagan philosophers for directions what to do, how to worship God, or manage any part of their conversation or conduct, either as to their general calling or as to their particular relations.

Barnes, Calvin, and Poole said in a nutshell what the Scripture teaches: We do not need man-made philosophies, humanistic ideas, pagan opinions, rabbinical fables, Popish legends, nor politically correct tripe. What we need, and all we need, is the Word of God. The Word of God is sufficient in and of itself. Our problem is that we need to learn to read it, study it, love it, and apply it.

I am convinced this is the absolute truth: I can work out any problem between any couple, in any family, or even in this country, as long as people are willing to submit to the Word of God. Why? Because the Word of God has the answers to every problem. Our problem is not with the Word of God, but with people who will not submit to it—individuals who think they are smarter than God.

Application and Conclusion

By way of application, the purpose of Scripture is exceedingly simple: to make us wise unto salvation, to be the means of our faith, to mature us in that faith, and to make us so complete that we have need of nothing in the worship or service of God. All I ever need to

know about salvation, preaching, teaching, starting a church, pastoring a church, going to church, how to act in church, and the roles of church leaders and members, I find in the Word of God. I do not need additional manuals. The Word of God is sufficient. There is nothing God has left out that needs to be supplied by man.

Whether we need convicting, converting, or chastening, the Word of God has all the answers. It teaches us, rebukes us, reproves us, corrects us, and edifies us. The Word of God is to be our teacher, guide, conscience, and director. We need to thank God daily for His Word—not just for salvation, but for everything included in it: the Scripture, the ministry, preaching, and teaching. Have we ever really understood why God gave us His Word? If we genuinely desire to be mature, obedient children of God, then we must not and cannot neglect it.

Paul said in 1 Corinthians 14:20, "Brethren, be not children in understanding: howbeit in malice be ye children, but in understanding be men." If we are mature in the faith, we will be that way because God gave us His Word, not just for salvation, but for maturation. Included in that maturation are instruction or doctrine, reproof, correction, and child training in righteousness, that we may be thoroughly furnished unto every good work for His honor and glory.

Father, we thank You specifically for the holy Word of God. We thank You that the Scriptures make us wise unto salvation, mature us in the faith, and make us complete and mature in Your worship and service. We thank You for the ministry and for those men who teach the pure, clear, unadulterated Word of God. We ask You, Heavenly Father, to build us up in the most holy faith and make us godly and holy. In the name of Jesus Christ, we ask and pray. Amen.

CHAPTER 4

Refusing the Enemy's Testimony

Introduction: The Problem of False Testimony

The book of Mark chapter one. And I want to call your attention to verse thirty-four. Mark chapter one and verse thirty-four. The title of today's message is "Refusing the Enemy's Testimony." I want you to think about that and you will understand the title momentarily: refusing the enemy's testimony. Notice, if you would, Mark 1 and verse 34. The Bible says this: "And he healed many that were sick of diverse diseases, and cast out many devils; and suffered not the devils to speak, because they knew him." I'm going to come back to this verse and show you what prompted my attention and grabbed my thought processes when I read this verse. But do you understand that there are many who testify of Christ who really do not know Christ?

In fact, all you've got to do is look around, first of all, to Hollywood. It's amazing to me how many Hollywood movie stars, quote-unquote, profess to be Christians, and yet their lives are absolute shambles. They live in total disobedience to Christ and His

law. And then on the other hand, there are the politicians. So many get on the bandwagon of Christianity and they profess to be Christians, and yet everything they do, every law they pass, every law they vote for is absolutely, totally contrary to Christ and the Bible. And thus they are not really Christians. They turn out to be the enemies of Christ.

Biblical Warnings Against False Prophets and Enemies

Now I want you to hold Mark chapter 1, but look in your Bibles to Acts chapter 13, and then to the book of Philippians chapter 2. Acts chapter 13. And I want you to note what the Apostle Paul said to Elymas the sorcerer, who tried to prevent the deputy of that country from coming to Christ and receiving the gospel. Notice, if you would, in Acts chapter 13, beginning there, if you would please, by verse 7: "Which was with the deputy of the country, Sergius Paulus, a prudent man; who called for Barnabas and Saul, and desired to hear the word of God. But Elymas the sorcerer (for so is his name by interpretation) withstood them, seeking to turn away the deputy from the faith. Then Saul, (who also is called Paul,) filled with the Holy Ghost, set his eyes on him, and said, O full of all subtlety and all mischief, thou child of the devil."

Now listen: "...thou enemy of all righteousness, wilt thou not cease to pervert the right ways of the Lord?" Notice how Paul addressed this man as the enemy of all righteousness. Now if you would turn right over to the book of Philippians, and note, if you would please, verse 3, and the Apostle Paul also has some very strong words for certain individuals. In Philippians chapter 3, notice, if you would please, verses 18 and 19. Philippians chapter 3, verses 18 and 19.

Here the Apostle said: “For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ: whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things.” The Bible tells us very clearly that there are enemies of the cross of Christ. And then he said, “whose God is their belly.” So obviously, there are many who testify of Christ who really do not know Christ.

They testify falsely, and we are commanded not to receive them nor to listen to their testimony.

The Bible as Sole Authority and the Danger of Other Sources

Interestingly, there are others who testify of Christ whose testimony may have some truth in it, and yet at the same time we are commanded not to listen to them, nor receive their testimonies at all. There are some who testify of Christ, who speak absolutely the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, and yet we are forbidden to receive their testimonies. You say, “How in the world can that be?” Well, I’ll show you from the Bible.

Do you realize that there are many who refuse to receive one simple truth? That is, the Bible is our sole authority for faith and practice. Let that sink in. The Bible is our sole authority for faith and practice. So what many then do is this: they turn from that simple principle, and they not only go to the figment of their own imaginations, they not only go to their own humanistic reasoning and rationalism, but some turn to try to find truth in other areas, such as fortune telling, horoscopes, astrology, Ouija boards, tarot cards, and even necromancy, which is, of course, talking with the dead.

Whenever you refuse the simple principle and truth that the Bible is our sole authority for faith and practice, you open yourself up to all of these practices that are condemned in the Scripture.

Our Lord warned us in Mark 4:24, “Take heed what ye hear.” In Luke 8:18, He said, “Take heed how ye hear.” We are responsible for what we hear. We must make sure that what we hear is the absolute truth, the Word of God. Once we know that it is the truth and the Word of God, we must pay careful attention to how we hear it. We cannot let our minds wander and stray if it is God's Word and God's truth. The Bible says in Isaiah 8:20, “To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them.” In order to give a proper testimony concerning Christ, one has to speak according to the Word of God.

False Prophets and Sincere but Lost Professors

Simply because one claims to be a preacher does not mean that he is one. I have recently been sent websites of men who claim to be preachers and were very obviously doing what most people would call preaching. But look at what the Bible says. Our Lord begins in Matthew 7:15: “Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves.”

In one sense, a false prophet is usually fairly easy to detect. He is not necessarily concerned with preaching and teaching the Word of God. He is concerned with edifying himself and getting everything for himself that he can get. He could care less about the sheep; he could care less about the people. But our Lord says, “Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves.”

Now notice what our Lord says: “You shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles?” Of course the answer is no. He said, “Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire.” He quotes this same truth again: “Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them,” not by what they say particularly, but by how they live and conduct their lives.

Now watch verse 21. He says, “Not everyone that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works?”

“And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.” On the one hand, He is warning against the false prophets. They are wolves in sheep’s clothing, and you will know them by their fruits. However, He now says, “Not everyone that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall inherit the kingdom of God.” No, He said, “Many will say to me in that day, have we not prophesied in thy name?” That is, have we not preached in your

name? “In your name, we have cast out devils. In your name, we have done many wonderful works.”

Undoubtedly, some of these individuals were very genuine, sincere, likable, and lovable. No doubt they did many things pleasing toward men; men may have admired them and spoken well of them. But our Lord says, here is the problem: they did not know Me. “Apart from me, you workers of iniquity, I never knew you.” Not “I knew you and forgot you.” “I never knew you” to begin with. You were never Mine. You were never genuinely regenerated or converted. Although genuinely sincere, they did not belong to Christ, and therefore they were bearing false witness. How could they point others to Christ if they did not know Christ themselves?

Our Lord has repeatedly warned us to take heed not only what we hear, but how we hear. He has also warned us to beware of individuals who claim to have special insights and supernatural knowledge. There are groups today that profess, “If you get in with us, we’re going to give you this secret, this esoteric knowledge that no one else has.” It is pure Gnosticism, the very thing that the apostles fought against in the New Testament.

In Matthew 24, beginning with verse 23, our Lord says: “Then if any man shall say unto you, Lo, here is Christ, or there; believe it not. For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect.” It is not, thank God, but if it were possible, they should deceive the very elect. “Behold, I have told you before. Wherefore if they shall say unto you, Behold, he is in the desert; go not forth: behold, he is in the secret chambers; believe it not. For as the lightning cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be.”

Notice that our Lord says, “Don’t believe these people,” period. Christ is revealed in the Word of God. He is not revealed in the imaginations of men or in the secret thought processes of men. There is no such thing as supernatural knowledge over and above and beyond the Word of God. If you go over and above and beyond the Word of God, mark it down: you have gone too far.

In John chapter 2, our Lord explains that in reality He does not need men to testify of Him, because He knows what is in man: "Now when he was in Jerusalem at the passover, in the feast day, many believed in his name, when they saw the miracles which he did. But Jesus did not commit himself unto them, because he knew all men, and needed not that any should testify of man: for he knew what was in man." Our Lord knows what is in man because, first of all, He is God and He is omniscient. Moreover, He created us. He understands His creation. He also knows the depravity of our hearts.

Jeremiah 17:9–10 says, "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it? I the Lord search the heart, I try the reins, even to give every man according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings." Only God knows our hearts perfectly, totally, and completely. The heart of man is deceitful above all things. Christ therefore knows all false pretensions, all false professions, and all hypocrites. You cannot deceive Him, thwart Him, or outsmart Him. He knows everything. Our Lord knew who belonged to Him and who did not.

Did He not say to His own disciples, "Have not I chosen you, and one of you is a devil?" He knew who Judas was. We should understand that the mere fact that our Lord commands us, as His children, to testify of Him and give witness to Him is an act of pure grace. Who are you and I to talk about the Son of God? Think of our sinfulness, ignorance, rebellion, and resistance to Him. Yet in His grace and mercy, He saved us, brought us to Himself, and now commands us to be His witnesses and testify of Him. It must be pure grace. God could have inscribed the gospel in the stars, written it in the heavens, inscribed it upon the mountains, or written it on the seashore, but He did not. He gave it to us in His Word and commanded us to be His witnesses and testify of Him.

That is pure, absolute grace. That is why Peter wrote in 1 Peter 2:5, "Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ." Our Lord is pleased to use private testimonies, but He is also more pleased, I think, to use public testimony—that is, the preaching of the gospel. For 1 Corinthians 1:21 says, "For after that in

the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe."

Christ's Refusal of Demonic Testimony in Mark

Now go back to Mark 1:34. The Bible says, "And he healed many that were sick of diverse diseases, and cast out many devils; and suffered not the devils to speak, because they knew him." Stop and think about that. He suffered not the devils to speak because they knew Him.

The word "devils" is the Greek word daimonion, from which we derive our English word "demons." Oftentimes in the Bible, they are referred to as unclean spirits or evil spirits. I do not care whether you call them demons, unclean spirits, or evil spirits; they are associated as the minions, ministers, and messengers of Satan.

Christ did not allow them to speak because they knew Him. They knew that Jesus Christ was and is the eternal Son of God. They knew that He was the Messiah, the Savior, the Lord, and God in the flesh, yet He would not allow them to speak. There are some who may give absolute truth in their testimony, but we are not to listen to it or receive it. They knew the truth, and our Lord said, "No, you cannot give testimony." The word "know" here does not indicate a personal, intimate knowledge. It is the Greek word eido, which means to know, to have knowledge of, or to understand.

These demons had what you and I would call an intellectual understanding. They had an intellectual knowledge. They did not have a saving relationship with Jesus Christ in any way whatsoever. It is possible to have an intellectual faith and no saving faith.

In Mark chapter 1, our Lord refused to let these demons speak even though they knew the truth. The unclean spirit cried out, "Let us alone; what have we to do with thee, thou Jesus of Nazareth? art thou come to destroy us? I know thee who thou art, the Holy One of God." Jesus rebuked him, saying, "Hold thy peace, and come out of him." The demon said, "I know thee who thou art, thou art the Holy One of God." Our Lord rebuked him and said, "Shut up. I don't want you testifying as to who I am."

Look in Mark chapter 3, beginning with verse 10: “For he had healed many; insomuch that they pressed upon him for to touch him, as many as had plagues. And unclean spirits, when they saw him, fell down before him, and cried, saying, Thou art the Son of God. And he straitly charged them that they should not make him known.” They cried out, saying, “Thou art the Son of God.” But He said, “Shut up. You can't say that. I'll not have that testimony.”

Look at Mark chapter 5 and verse 7. Here is the maniac of Gadara. When he saw Jesus afar off, he ran and worshipped Him, and cried with a loud voice, “What have I to do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of the most high God? I adjure thee by God, that thou torment me not.” He said, “What have I to do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of the most high God?”

Here is the point: in each of these instances, these unclean spirits acknowledged and confessed the deity of Jesus Christ. They knew that He was God. They knew that He was the Messiah. They also knew that they were helpless before Him and had to obey Him. They acknowledged that they were going to be punished and tormented. They knew these things, yet they had no saving relationship with Jesus Christ. Intellectual knowledge, even accurate knowledge concerning Christ, is not saving faith.

"Now when the sun was setting, all they that had any sick with divers diseases brought them unto him; and he laid his hands on every one of them, and healed them. And devils also came out of many, crying out, and saying, Thou art Christ the Son of God. And he rebuking them suffered them not to speak: for they knew that he was Christ." Let me point out something that you should have already thought of this.

Demons' Intellectual Knowledge vs. Saving Faith

In this instance, demons are smarter than men. They know that Jesus Christ is God. They know that they're helpless before Him. They know that they'll be tormented and punished. And yet, we have in our day and time, like we've always had, men who claim to have superior intellects and superior knowledge who deny the deity of Christ, deny eternal punishment, and deny that they are helpless. Somehow, demons have a little more sense than most men.

Among those who deny the deity of Christ, deny the power of Christ, and deny the fact that they will be punished for their wickedness and their sins are our rulers—our civil rulers. This is amazing to me. This will show you how ignorant and how ungodly most civil rulers have been and still are.

Look in your Bibles, 1 Corinthians chapter two, and notice verse six. Look what the apostle Paul writes: "Howbeit we speak wisdom among them that are perfect: yet not the wisdom of this world, nor of the princes of this world, that come to nought."

So there is the wisdom of God, and there is the wisdom of the world. We speak wisdom among them that are perfect, yet not the wisdom of this world, nor of the princes of this world, that come to nought. There is a godly wisdom and there is a human wisdom; there is a biblical wisdom and there is a worldly wisdom. They are contrary to each other.

Notice verse 7 again: "But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world unto our glory: which none of the princes of this world knew: for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory." Isn't that interesting? I want you to stop and think about that.

Whether you are talking about Pilate, Herod, Tiberius, or any ruler in those days, none of them had any idea who Christ was, what His mission was, or what He was doing. They were absolutely, totally, and completely ignorant. In 1 Corinthians chapter 1, beginning with verse 18, the Apostle Paul wrote:

"For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God. For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent. Where is the wise? where is the scribe? where is the disputer of this world? hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe."

The world thinks that everything concerning Christ and the Bible is nothing but foolishness. They have no time for Christ or Scripture. Foolish men do not believe in Christ, trust Christ, or desire Christ.

They believe somehow that they are superior to Christ, and that their knowledge is superior to the wisdom of the Word of God. What has God done? The Bible says that, in His wisdom, He has destroyed the wisdom of the wise. In other words, He has taken them in their own foolishness and captured them in their own rebellion.

It is true. In Isaiah 53, verses 1 through 3, speaking about Christ, Isaiah wrote: "Who hath believed our report? and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed? For he shall grow up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground: he hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him. He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not."

Now notice what the Bible says about Christ. He grew up as a root out of dry ground. In other words, Christ did not come riding on a white charger with gold and silver garments all over Him. He came as the lowly, humble, obedient servant of the one true and living God. The world said, "I don't have anything to do with Him. We want someone to come in on a white charger and take charge, someone who can demonstrate that He's really King of kings."

That's why in Psalm 2, verses 10 through 12, the Bible commands the kings and rulers of this earth: "Be wise now therefore, O ye kings: be instructed, ye judges of the earth. Serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice with trembling. Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all they that put their trust in him."

So what do kings and rulers of the earth do? They despise Him. They think He's weak and helpless. Who wants a root out of dry ground? Who wants someone with no form or comeliness? Who wants someone to come as a servant? The world hates Christ. The rulers hate Christ.

Let me show you something: in the biblical sense of the word, men are worse than demons. How can I say that? James writes in chapter 2, verse 19: "Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble."

What did I just read? He said, "The devils also believe, and tremble." I have shown you all through Scripture where they confess and acknowledge that Jesus Christ is God in the flesh. There are many today who profess to believe in Christ. They have an intellectual faith. They will freely admit that Christ is God, or that the Bible is the Word of God. But are you listening? Their faith is not even as great as the demons' faith. Demons are totally, completely, helplessly lost, because they not only believe, they tremble. Men today not only disbelieve; they will not tremble before the sovereign God of heaven and earth. All through the Gospels, we read that Christ would not allow the demons to testify to His person.

Reasons Christ Refused the Enemy's Testimony

The question we must ask is why. They certainly knew who He was. They had to obey Him. They had no choice. Even witnesses in those days testified that the demons had to obey. Mark 1, verse 27: The people asked, "What thing is this? what new doctrine is this? for with authority commandeth he even the unclean spirits, and they do obey him." Everyone around knew that He had power over the unclean spirits, and they had to obey. And we know that these unclean spirits spoke the truth, for they said, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God."

So why would He not allow them to speak? Why would He not receive their testimony? Why would He not allow others to receive their testimony? Well, let me try to give you some answers. First of all, Christ refused to allow those to testify who would only soil and injure His character. Now, it is true that there were times that our Lord's enemies spoke well of Him, sometimes intentionally, sometimes unintentionally.

It is quite one thing for your enemy to say, “You are right, I am wrong.” For instance, in Matthew 27:54, when our Lord was crucified, the Bible says, “Now when the centurion, and they that were with him, watching Jesus, saw the earthquake, and those things that were done, they feared greatly, saying, Truly this was the Son of God.” They at least acknowledged that He was indeed the Son of God.

Now consider Caiaphas, the high priest, who was a wicked man. Even he testified of Christ, though not willingly. John 11:47 says, “Then gathered the chief priests and the Pharisees a council, and said, What do we? for this man doeth many miracles.” In other words, it was obvious that He was doing miracles. They continued, “If we let him thus alone, all men will believe on him: and the Romans shall come and take away both our place and nation.” They were interested only in themselves.

“ And one of them, named Caiaphas, being the high priest that same year, said unto them, Ye know nothing at all, nor consider that it is expedient for us, that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not.” Caiaphas did not mean this in a good sense, although he was telling the truth. Verse 51 says, “And this spake he not of himself: but being high priest that year, he prophesied that Jesus should die for that nation; and not for that nation only, but that also he should gather together in one the children of God that were scattered abroad.” Caiaphas meant, “Let’s kill him and save our place.” But our Lord took that testimony and turned it around for a biblical testimony, since Caiaphas was indeed the high priest at that particular time.

It is one thing to have your enemy testify that you are right and he is wrong. It is quite another to have someone who hates and despises you, your mortal enemy, testify of your character. Can you imagine being in a court of law with a whole list of prostitutes there to testify of your purity? How about having a thief testify as to your honesty, or a liar and perjurer testify to your truthfulness?

If the prostitutes told the truth and you were virtuous, if the thief told the truth and you were honest, and if a liar and perjurer told the truth and you were truthful, who is going to believe them? Some in those instances may testify truthfully, but the impact of that testimony is negative. Christ therefore would not allow wicked ones to testify as to His person, His character, or His mission.

The Apostle Paul believed the same. In Acts chapter 16, a young woman was demon possessed. She was a soothsayer and had gained much money for those who controlled her by her soothsaying. Watch what she does. Acts 16:16 says: "And it came to pass, as we went to prayer, a certain damsel possessed with a spirit of divination met us,

which brought her masters much gain by soothsaying: the same followed Paul and us, and cried, saying, These men are the servants of the most high God, which shew unto us the way of salvation."

"And this did she many days. But Paul, being grieved, turned and said to the spirit, I command thee in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her. And he came out the same hour."

Was not this girl telling the truth? These were men of God, and they were showing the way of salvation. That was the truth. But the Bible says Paul, being grieved, turned and said, "No, no. We're not going to have that kind of testimony." He commanded the evil spirit to come out of her. After that, Paul and Silas were thrown in jail and beaten because her masters lost their hope of gain. Paul likewise refused a testimony that was not of God. The testimony may have been true, but it was coming from an enemy of God.

It is not proper for demons to preach the gospel. It is not proper for lost men to preach the gospel. It is not proper for hypocrites to preach the gospel. It does not matter whether they are telling the truth or not. Christ and the Apostle Paul refused the enemy's testimony. The enemy would end up soiling and injuring the character of Christ and the apostles.

Here is the second reason Christ refused their testimony: He would not receive a testimony from an irreconcilable enemy who was doomed to destruction.

In Mark 1:24, notice what the enemy said. Remember, he is telling the truth, but he is still an enemy. The demon said, “Let us alone; what have we to do with thee, thou Jesus of Nazareth? art thou come to destroy us? I know thee who thou art, the Holy One of God.” “Art thou come to destroy us?” It seems they have an inkling of what is going to happen. Yes, they know.

Notice Matthew 8:29. They do not only know who Jesus Christ is; they know that they are doomed. “And when he was come to the other side into the country of the Gergesenes, there met him two possessed with devils, coming out of the tombs, exceeding fierce, so that no man might pass by that way. And, behold, they cried out, saying, What have we to do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of God? art thou come hither to torment us before the time?” In other words,

“We know we are going to be tormented, but if you come to take us early…” They are irreconcilable enemies.

Revelation 12:12 says, “Therefore rejoice, ye heavens, and ye that dwell in them. Woe to the inhabiters of the earth and of the sea! for the devil is come down unto you, having great wrath, because he knoweth that he hath but a short time.” He knows he is doomed. He knows there is only a short time.

There can be no reconciliation between light and darkness. Either the light will drive out the darkness or the darkness will overcome the light. There can be no reconciliation between holiness and unrighteousness. There can be no reconciliation between those who love, adore, and worship Christ and those who hate Him. There cannot be.

The Apostle Paul himself said in 1 Corinthians 16:22, “If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema Maranatha.” Anathema means to be doomed and damned. Maranatha means at the coming of the Lord. So the Apostle Paul said, if any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be doomed and damned at the coming of the Lord. There is no reconciliation—not between those who love Christ and those who hate Christ, and not between truth and lies.

Paul said in 2 Corinthians 6:14–18, “Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty.”

As God’s people, we should have nothing to do with the enemies of all righteousness. We should have nothing to do with the devil, his minions, his messengers, his instruments, his schemes, or his entertainment. That includes Harry Potter. It includes a lot of junk

that comes out of Hollywood and a lot of stuff that comes on your television sets. You have nothing in common with that. Nothing!

You should absolutely, totally, completely, and unequivocally refuse to watch any religious program that Hollywood puts out. I can assure you, I do not care who does it: if Hollywood puts it out, it is not biblical. Our Lord said, "I'm not going to take any testimony from irreconcilable enemies who are doomed to destruction."

Thirdly, Christ did not need any further testimony than that which had already been given. In John chapter 5, beginning at verse 31, our Lord said:

"If I bear witness of myself, my witness is not true. There is another that beareth witness of me; and I know that the witness which he witnesseth of me is true. Ye sent unto John, and he bare witness unto the truth. But I receive not testimony from man: but these things I say, that ye might be saved. He was a burning and a shining light: and ye were willing for a season to rejoice in his light. But I have greater witness than that of John: for the works which the Father hath given me to finish, the same works that I do, bear witness of me, that the Father hath sent me. And the Father himself, which hath sent me, hath borne witness of me. Ye have neither heard his voice at any time, nor seen his shape. And ye have not his word abiding in you: for whom he hath sent, him ye believe not. Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me. And ye will not come to me, that ye might have life."

Our Lord says, "You want testimonies? You want witnesses? All right. I'll give you some witnesses." The first witness is John the Baptist. He testified of Christ and to the truth. Read it for yourself in the Gospels. John the Baptist was a witness and the forerunner of Christ, but our Lord said, "I don't necessarily have to have the testimony of man." He said this because John was a burning and a shining light, and they were willing for a season to listen to him.

"I have a greater witness than that of John," He said in verse 36: the works that He did. Remember that He told those people, "Believe me not, believe me at least for the works' sake." The works that

Christ did evidenced and testified that He was indeed the Son of God.

“If you don’t want to believe my works, I have another testifier, another witness: the Father”—the Father who had sent Him and testified of Him on several occasions. Then He said, “There’s still another one that testifies of me, and that’s the Scriptures.”

“You search them, for they testify of me.” There was the witness of John the Baptist, the witness of His works, the witness of the Father, and the witness of the Scriptures.

In light of all these witnesses, look at what He says in John 5:40: “And ye will not come to me, that ye might have life.” Our Lord said, “You wanted witnesses? I gave them to you: John the Baptist, my works, the Father, the Scriptures.” Do you realize that the problem wicked men have is not an insufficiency of truth or witnesses? There is plenty of truth, and plenty of witnesses. Yet, in light of all these witnesses, our Lord said, “You will not come to me, that ye might have life.”

The Sufficiency of Scripture and Warning Against Seeking Signs

In other words, your will is locked in stubborn rebellion to Me. You love your sin. You love your wickedness. Men will not come. The truth of the matter is, men by nature do not want to come to Christ. They cannot come because they love their sin more than they love salvation. The problem is not that there is not a sufficiency of truth in this world.

We do not need the devil. We do not need demons. We do not need the ungodly. We have sufficient truth right here; we just need to learn to pay attention to it. In this day and time—and it has been like this forever—everybody wants a sign. You remember our Lord said in Matthew 16:4, "A wicked and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign." The Pharisees came to Christ, tempting Him and seeking a sign in Matthew 16.

He said, "You hypocrites. You can discern the face of the sky, but you can't discern the times." You say it is going to be fair weather because in the evening the sun is red and lowering; in the morning, it

is going to be foul weather because the sun is red and lowering. You know all about this. But then He said, "A wicked and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign."

What are most people seeking today? They are looking for feelings, emotionalism, an experience—anything and everything other than the pure, unadulterated Word of God. If you want something over and above and beyond the Word of God, you are going to keep on wanting until you die, unless you get it from the devil. Christ is not going to condescend to give you a feeling, emotion, or experience that is extra-biblical, over and above and beyond the Word of God. He is just not going to do it.

I want to tie it together and show you something. Turn in your Bibles to Acts chapter 19. To me, this is not only one of the most humorous passages in Scripture, but also one of the most instructive. Every time I read this, I smile. Sometimes I laugh out loud, but it is funny. It shows that our Lord—and His true preachers—are known in hell. Watch this. Acts 19:13: "Then certain of the vagabond Jews,

The exorcists took upon themselves to call over those who had evil spirits the name of the Lord Jesus, saying, “We adjure you by Jesus whom Paul preacheth.” Seven sons of Sceva, a Jew and chief of the priests, did so. The evil spirit answered, “Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are ye?” The man in whom the evil spirit was leaped on them, overcame them, and prevailed against them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded. In other words, he beat the devil out of them.

Notice what they said: “We adjure you by Jesus whom Paul preacheth, come out of the man.” But the evil spirit said, “Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are you?” The evil spirit recognized the authority of Jesus and Paul, but he did not recognize the authority of these evil men who were trying to cast him out.

We should not need, desire, or want to receive the testimony or praise of the wicked. I do not need anyone in politics to pat me on the back, nor anyone in Hollywood to elevate me on a pedestal. I could care less, and you should care less as well, because our sole authority over faith and practice is the Word of God. We should

never be fooled when the enemy tries to butter us up or speak our language.

What did our Lord say? “By their fruits you shall know them.” Do not listen to their words; watch their lives. If their lives are contrary to their words, they are liars. You will know them by their conduct and actions. There are only two sides: saved and unsaved, covenant keepers and covenant breakers. You are either saved or unsaved, either a covenant keeper or a covenant breaker. There is no in-between.

There is no king's ex. There is no neutral ground. There is no compromise. Our Lord said, "He that is not with me is against me; and he that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad."

This brings me to the second application: If we really want to know more about Christ, about heaven, or about anything, all we need to do is study the Scripture. Do you realize that everything we need to know for life and godliness, according to Scripture, is given to us? If I want to know how to be a good husband, all I have to do is read the Scripture. If you want to know how to be a good wife, all you have to do is read the Scripture: "Wife, submit yourselves to your husband." If you want to know how to handle your money, study the Scripture. If you want to know how to be a good civil ruler, study the Scripture. If you want to know how to be a good farmer or gardener, study the Scripture. The Scripture gives us everything we need to know. If you really want to be a good Christian, study the Scripture.

I want to show you one last passage and how absolutely emphatic Scripture is that the Word of God is our sole authority for faith and practice. This is the story of Lazarus and the rich man. The Bible tells us that Lazarus died and was carried by angels into Abraham's bosom. The rich man died, and in hell he lifted up his eyes, being in torments. Seeing Lazarus afar off in Abraham's bosom, he said, "Father Abraham, send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame."

Abraham explained to the rich man that there was a great gulf between them and that they could not cross it. "And beside all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed: so that they which would pass from hence to you cannot; neither can they pass to us,

that would come from thence." In other words, once you die, your fate is sealed in that sense of the word. You either die saved or you die unsaved. There is no changing it once you are dead.

Here is what the rich man said. Remember, he is in hell: "Then he said, I pray thee therefore, father, that thou wouldest send him to my father's house: for I have five brethren; that he may testify unto them, lest they also come into this place of torment." He became missionary-minded very quickly. He said, "I got five brothers. Send Lazarus that he may warn them lest they come to this place of torment."

"And Abraham saith unto him, They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them." They have Moses and the prophets. Let them hear them. You are not getting anything else other than what God has given you in His Word. Then he said, "Nay, father Abraham: but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent." And Abraham said, "If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead."

Are you listening? I know someone who rose from the dead: Jesus Christ. And the world still will not believe. "They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them." If you do not hear the Word of God, you will not hear anything. If you do not hear the Word of God, nothing you hear will do you any good or help you. We do not need the enemy's testimony. What we need is the testimony of God, and that is given to us in His Word.

Application: Reject the Enemy's Testimony, Trust Scripture Alone

There is another lesson we should learn: you do not believe the enemies of God. Let me change that. You do not receive the testimony of the enemies of God, even when they speak the truth. Most of the time they will not speak the truth, but if they do speak the truth, you still do not receive it. Our Lord refused His enemy's testimony, and He said, "No."

The only testimony we need is the testimony of God our Father, who has revealed Himself in Jesus Christ and has given us His Word.

Father, in Thy name we bow to Thee this day. We are thankful for Jesus Christ. We are thankful for the Word of God. Lord, help us to learn it, know it, live it, and apply it. Help us to see its absolute importance. Give us grace that we may serve Thee acceptably with reverence and godly fear. In the name of Jesus Christ, we ask and pray. Amen.

CHAPTER 5

So, You Got What You Wanted

Matthew 27:1-10 says:

"When the morning was come, all the chief priests and elders of the people took counsel against Jesus to put him to death. When they had bound him, they led him away, and delivered him to Pontius Pilate the governor. Then Judas, which had betrayed him, when he saw that he was condemned, repented himself, and brought again the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, saying, I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood. And they said, What is that to us? See thou to that. And he cast down the pieces of silver in the temple, and departed, and went and hanged himself. And the chief priests took the silver pieces, and said, It is not lawful for us to put them into the treasury, because it is the price of blood. And they took counsel, and bought with them the potter's field, to bury strangers in. Wherefore that field was called, The field of blood, unto this day. Then was fulfilled that which was spoken by Jeremy the prophet, saying, And they took the thirty pieces of silver, the price of him that was valued, whom they of the children of Israel

did value; and gave them for the potter's field, as the Lord appointed me."

Introduction: The Selfish Attitude

The title of the message is, "So you got what you wanted. Is that all that matters?" I have heard people say, "I have gotten that which I wanted, and that is all that matters." There could not be a clearer attitude of absolute selfishness: "I am number one, I am all that counts, and nothing else matters." Such an attitude demonstrates a lack of concern for others and for principles of righteousness.

You have to stop and ask yourself: Are your desires and wishes really all that count? Does the universe revolve around you, and do you expect everything to revolve around you? The message involves the betrayal of our Lord by Judas and the connivance and conspiracy of the religious leaders to falsely accuse, condemn, and murder the Lord Jesus Christ. Yes, it was murder on the part of the religious leaders.

The Conspiracy to Murder Christ

Peter condemns what the religious leaders did in Acts 2:23: "Him, referring to Christ, being delivered by the determined counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain." It was wicked hands that were placed upon our Lord.

Acts 4:26 says, "The kings of the earth stood up, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord, and against his Christ." The Scripture continues: "For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, were gathered together, for to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done."

I am just trying to show you that it was indeed a murder. Acts 13:28 says, "And though they found no cause of death in him, yet desired they Pilate that he should be slain." They found no cause of death in Him. There was no reason for Christ to be put to death. It is evident, then, that there was indeed a conspiracy to kill the Lord Jesus Christ.

You have to remember that they had repeatedly tried to murder Christ as you read through the Bible. In Luke 4:28–30, "And all they in the synagogue, when they heard these things, were filled with wrath. And rose up, and thrust him out of the city, and led him unto the brow of the hill whereon their city was built, that they might cast him down headlong. But he, passing through the midst of them, went his way." They took Him out of the synagogue, trying to push Him over a cliff. John 8:59 says, "Then took they up stones to cast at him: but Jesus hid himself, and went out of the temple, going through the midst of them, and so passed by."

They tried to stone Him to death. In John 7:30, the Bible says, "Then they sought to take him: but no man laid hands on him, because his hour was not yet come." There was another incident when they tried to kill the Lord Jesus. In John 8:20, we have another incident: "These words spake Jesus in the treasury, as he taught in the temple: and no man laid hands on him; for his hour was not yet come."

The scribes, the Pharisees, and the Sadducees were so frustrated with Christ that they actually conspired to destroy Him. Mark 11:18 says, "And the scribes and chief priests heard it, and sought how they might destroy him. For they feared him, because all the people was astonished at his doctrine." Note what happened: all the scribes and the chief priests heard it, and they sought how they might destroy Him. They were not merely displeased with Christ; they were seeking a way to eliminate Him because the people were astonished at His doctrine.

In John 11:47, we read, "Then gathered the chief priests and the Pharisees a council, and said, What do we? What are we going to do? For this man doeth many miracles. If we let him thus alone, all men will believe on him: and the Romans shall come and take away both our place and nation. And one of them, named Caiaphas, being the high priest that same year, said unto them, Ye know nothing at all, nor consider that it is expedient for us, that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not."

Here Caiaphas is advocating that they kill the Lord Jesus Christ. It is better for one to die than for the whole nation to die, is his argument. But note what he said, because this is very, very revealing:

"If we let him thus alone, all men will believe on him: and the Romans shall come and take away both our place and nation." They would lose their place, power, and authority if they let Him alone. Therefore, they needed to kill Him. Their concern was that, if Christ were allowed to continue, all men would believe on Him, and the Romans would take away both their place and their nation.

Here is indisputable proof of the conspiracy. Look at Matthew 27, beginning with verse 1, and tie these Scriptures together: "When the morning was come, all the chief priests and elders of the people took counsel against Jesus to put him to death." Notice that they took counsel to put Christ to death. Why would they need to take counsel to put Christ to death?

Let me show you what they initially charged Him with. Look in Matthew 26, beginning with verse 63. Jesus stood before them, but held His peace. The high priest said, "I adjure thee by the living God, that thou tell us whether thou be the Christ, the Son of God." Jesus answered, "Thou hast said: nevertheless I say unto you, Hereafter shall ye see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven." Then the high priest rent his clothes, saying, "He hath spoken blasphemy."

"What further need have we of witnesses? Behold, now ye have heard his blasphemy. What think ye?" They answered and said, "He is guilty of death."

Notice the sequence. In Matthew 26, they charged Christ with blasphemy and said He was guilty of death. Why, then, in Matthew 27:1, when the morning was come, did all the chief priests and elders take counsel against Jesus to put Him to death? Why take counsel? They had already charged Him with blasphemy. They had already said He was worthy of death. Why were they now sitting together in counsel and conspiring to put Him to death?

Here is why: a charge of blasphemy would not induce Pilate to put Christ to death. Blasphemy was not against Roman law or Roman rule. Therefore, they wanted the Romans to put Christ to death. Why did they not put Christ to death themselves? Some say that, technically speaking, because they were under Roman rule, they no longer had the power of the death penalty and could not execute it.

That may have been technically true, but it certainly did not stop them from stoning Stephen to death for blasphemy.

They set Stephen up. Stephen was innocent as well. Acts 6:11 says, "Then they suborned men, which said, We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses, and against God. And they stirred up the people, and the elders, and the scribes, and came upon him, and caught him, and brought him to the council, and set up false witnesses, which said, This man ceaseth not to speak blasphemous words against this holy place, and the law: for we have heard him say, that this Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place, and shall change the customs which Moses delivered us."

"And all that sat in the council, looking steadfastly on him, saw his face as it had been the face of an angel." Then, in chapter 7, Stephen said, "Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God." Then they cried out with a loud voice, stopped their ears, ran upon him with one accord, cast him out of the city, and stoned him. The witnesses laid down their clothes at a young man's feet, whose name was Saul. They stoned Stephen, calling upon God and saying, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." He kneeled down and cried with a loud voice, "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge." And when he had said this, he fell asleep.

Well, if they did not have the power to execute anyone, how did they execute Stephen? They executed Stephen on a charge of blasphemy, the same charge that they lodged against the Lord Jesus Christ. Why did they not stone Christ? There are many answers to that. One, of course, is that it was prophesied that Christ should be hanged on a tree. But there is an immediate human answer as to why they did not stone Christ.

We read it in Mark 11:18: "And the scribes and chief priests heard it, and sought how they might destroy him: for they feared him, because all the people was astonished at his doctrine." They were not only afraid of Christ; they were afraid of the people. Mark 14:1–2 says, "After two days was the feast of the passover, and of unleavened bread: and the chief priests and the scribes sought how they might take him by craft, and put him to death. But they said, Not on the feast day, lest there be an uproar of the people."

In other words, they wanted to do this, but they did not want the people upset with them. They feared Christ and the people. They did not want a backlash, and they thought that if they could get the Romans to put Him to death, it would make them look guiltless.

The chief priests took counsel and agreed that Christ deserved to die on a charge of blasphemy. Yet they did not dare stone Him as they had stoned Stephen in Acts chapter 7, for they feared the people. So they consulted together about how they might place a charge upon Christ that would cause the Roman Empire to put Him to death. In Matthew 26:66, they declared, “He is guilty of death.”

They said He deserved to die, but when they brought Him to Pilate, they laid different charges against Him. They said He was guilty of perverting the nation and of forbidding tribute to Caesar. No blasphemy was mentioned. They had to obtain these false charges to induce Pilate to put Him to death, because Pilate had no jurisdiction over a charge of blasphemy.

Pilate was going to release Christ. Three times Pilate declared that Jesus Christ was innocent, saying, “I find no fault in him.” But in John 19:6-7, they finally revealed why they really wanted Him dead: “By our law he ought to die, because he made himself the Son of God.”

When the chief priests and officers saw Him, they cried out, saying, “Crucify Him, crucify Him.” Pilate said unto them, “Take ye Him, and crucify Him: for I find no fault in Him.” He was innocent. The Jews answered him, “We have a law, and by our law He ought to die, because He made Himself the Son of God.” There it is: the charge of blasphemy finally coming to light according to their interpretation. He made Himself the Son of God, and by their law He ought to die.

Three times Pilate found Christ innocent. The reason he found Him innocent was because, in Mark 15:10, “he knew that the chief priests had delivered him for envy.” They were fearful of Christ and envious of Christ, envious of the fact that people were responding to Him.

Throughout this entire episode, one simple point emerges in two parts, followed by the application. Initially, Judas got what he

wanted, and that was all that mattered. We think we know what we want, and we are willing to move heaven and earth to get it. We often take the attitude, "I want what I want, and that's all that matters." Sometimes—in fact, many times—when we get what we wanted, we are horrified because it really did not turn out to be what we wanted. I have known men and women who thought they wanted another person's spouse. They worked it out and got them. It was pure horror, a total nightmare, and absolute confusion.

Judas Got What He Wanted

Initially, Judas got what he wanted. What did Judas want? He wanted money. He was a thief, and he betrayed his Master for thirty pieces of silver. "Then one of the twelve, called Judas Iscariot, went unto the chief priests, and said unto them, What will ye give me, and I will deliver him unto you? And they covenanted with him for thirty pieces of silver." From that time he sought opportunity to betray Him.

Judas initiated the betrayal. He sought out the chief priests and asked for the best price, the best offer they could give him. He would betray unto them the Son of God. They offered him thirty pieces of silver, and Judas made a covenant with the chief priests. Scripture says that from that time he sought opportunity to betray Him. Judas probably had many opportunities to betray Christ, yet he wanted one that would not reveal him as a betrayer.

Do you not remember that Judas betrayed our Lord with a kiss, which is a token of love and friendship? In Matthew 26:48, the Scripture says, "Now he that betrayed him gave them a sign, saying, Whomsoever I shall kiss, that same is he: hold him fast."

Have you ever wondered about the thirty pieces of silver? The thirty pieces of silver were part of prophecy, for in Zechariah 11:13 we read: "And the LORD said unto me, Cast it unto the potter: a goodly price that I was prised at of them. And I took the thirty pieces of silver, and cast them to the potter in the house of the LORD." Judas then betrayed Christ for thirty pieces of silver. Let us suppose that those thirty pieces were thirty ounces of silver.

In our day, thirty ounces would probably be worth nine hundred, one thousand, or eleven hundred dollars. That does not sound like very much to us. But according to the Professional Coin Grading Service, the value of the thirty coins was significant at the time. Such a sum would likely have purchased a small farm—a considerable bribe in that day. On average, a small farm today costs around $240,000 in our country, including a farmhouse, a barn, equipment, and approximately 120 acres on which to plant and harvest crops. Thus, the thirty pieces of silver at that particular time could have purchased a great deal.

Judas wanted the money, and he got it. Why did he want the money? The answer Scripture gives is that he was a thief; he was covetous. In John 12, after Mary had poured a pound of spikenard on our Lord, a very costly ointment, we read beginning in verse 4: “Then saith one of his disciples, Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, which should betray him, Why was not this ointment sold for three hundred pence, and given to the poor? This he said, not that he cared for the poor; but because he was a thief, and had the bag, and bare what was put therein.”

So Judas was a thief and a covetous individual. I cannot tell you that Judas wanted to buy a farm or a new chariot; Scripture does not tell me that. But I will tell you what Scripture says: unhappily, he thought he wanted the money, and that nothing else mattered.

He got the money and thought that was it. Some individuals tend to think that Judas somehow thought Christ would work a miracle and deliver Himself, as perhaps He had done on other occasions, when we read that He went through the midst of them and so passed by. Judas would have his money, Christ would be free, and He would not be condemned.

In Mark 14:44, there is an interesting word: “And he that betrayed him had given them a token, saying, Whomsoever I shall kiss, that same is he; take him, and lead him away safely.” Safety was not exactly what the high priest had in mind.

When Judas saw that Jesus Christ was condemned in Matthew 27, either by the Sanhedrin, by Pilate, or by both, his conscience was smitten. Somewhere in the midst of all the treachery, Judas repented

himself. He changed his mind. He did not repent toward God, exercise faith toward Jesus Christ, or ask Christ for forgiveness. He was merely conscience-stricken that he had betrayed an innocent man. Judas knew that Christ was innocent.

Judas's Remorse and Suicide

This undoubtedly threw a wrench, temporarily, in the plans of the priests. They could no longer imply that Christ was an impostor and that Christ had been betrayed by one of His own. The traitor had recanted and confirmed that they were murdering an innocent man. Judas knew Christ and was competent to testify. Had he known of any wickedness in Christ, he could have stated it. He would have endeavored to vindicate himself had he known of any wickedness. You need to consider these facts concerning Judas.

First, he was chosen to be an apostle by Christ. Secondly, he forsook all to follow the Lord. Thirdly, he spent three and a half years traveling the length and breadth of the land with Christ. Fourthly, he saw all the miracles of Christ. Fifthly, he heard Christ give all His sermons and discourses. Sixthly, he watched as Christ healed the sick, raised the dead, and cast out demons. Seventhly, he, along with the other apostles, was sent out to preach the gospel. Eighthly, he was one of the leaders of the apostolic band, for he was the treasurer. Ninthly, no one ever suspected that he was the traitor. Matthew 26:20-22 shows how Judas was never suspected.

When the even was come, he sat down with the twelve. And as they did eat, he said, “Verily I say unto you, that one of you shall betray me.” They were exceeding sorrowful, and began every one of them to say unto him, “Lord, is it I?” So no one suspected Judas, but everyone suspected themselves.

If you turn to John 18:5, you will find that Judas finally reveals himself for actually what he was. Jesus, knowing all things that should come upon him, went forth and said unto them, “Whom seek ye?” They answered him, “Jesus of Nazareth.” Jesus saith unto them, “I am he.” And Judas also, which betrayed him, stood with them. Judas finally has taken his place with those who hated Christ, with those who wanted to destroy him.

He may have covered his design and his thievery. However, his cover never made it to his conscience. We read how Judas returned the blood money in Matthew 27:5: “And he cast down the pieces of silver in the temple, and departed, and went and hanged himself.”

All Judas wanted initially was money. He got what he wanted. That was all that mattered until his conscience smote him. He cast the money down in the temple; all of a sudden, he no longer wanted it. He realized what he had done and went out and hanged himself.

When Judas returned to them, he said, “I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood.” And they said, “What is that to us? See thou to that.” You got what you wanted. You asked for what you wanted, and we gave it to you. You got it. We do not care. Judas cast it down and went out and hanged himself. All he wanted was money, and when he got it, he did not want it.

The Priests Got What They Wanted

Secondly, the priests got what they wanted, and that was all that mattered. Judas said, “I have betrayed the innocent blood,” and cast the money down into the temple. The wicked have no use for truth, or for those who speak the truth. Judas, as wicked as he was, said, “I have sinned and I have betrayed the innocent blood. I know he is innocent. I know that for a fact.” What is that to us? See thou to that. The wicked will use us.

If we will compromise and fit into their plan, we are accepted. But if we will not compromise and fit into their plan, we are expendable and worthless. I want you to notice how easy and how simple it is for the wicked to cast off the worth and value of a soul or a person. When Judas said, “I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood,” they answered, “What is that to us? See thou to that.” They did not care about Judas, what he said, or what he knew. They simply told him to take care of it and do whatever he wanted to do.

Judas made the priests his confessors, and instead of giving him absolution, they threw him under the truck. They did not care for truth. They did not care for Judas. They did not care for Christ. They wanted Christ dead and out of the way.

Now let me ask you a question. These priests who made this covenant with Judas were supposed to know the Scriptures. Why would they not even examine the claims of Christ in light of the Scriptures? These were religious leaders. In John 5:39, our Lord challenged them: "Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me." They should have at least searched.

But here was the problem: They did not want verification of the truth. They wanted the condemnation of Christ. Thus they carelessly and wickedly condemned Him. He was not worth anything to them. His claims, His works, His ministry, His good deeds, and His benevolence meant absolutely nothing to them. When they said to Judas, "What is that to us? See thou to that," they were also saying concerning Christ, "If He is innocent, see thou to that. We could care less. We want Him condemned. We want Him out of the way. We have gotten that which we wanted, and that is all that matters. We have got Him right where we want Him." True, they did have Christ, and they did to Him exactly what they wanted. I want you to look in your Bibles to Luke 24:7.

Look in Luke chapter 24 and verse 7. It is true that they did indeed have Christ. But look what Christ said: "Saying, The Son of man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again." He was delivered into their hands. Now, I want you to look back to Luke 23. Look at Luke 23. Watch this carefully. Let us begin with verse 24. Look carefully now at Luke 23.

Pilate gave sentence that it should be as they required. He released unto them him that for sedition and murder was cast into prison, whom they had desired; but he delivered Jesus to their will. They got that which they wanted, and to them that was all that mattered. They wanted their will. They wanted Christ crucified. They wanted Christ out of the way.

The Consequences of Getting What You Want

The high priests, the chief priests, the Pharisees, and the scribes wanted Christ dead, and to them that was all that mattered. You can get that which you want. You can. And if it is contrary to God and

God's will, once you get it, you will wish a million times you never had it.

Judas got what he wanted, and to him that was all that mattered. The priests got what they wanted, and to them that was all that mattered. Judas covenanted for thirty pieces of silver. Judas is long gone, and so is the silver. However, our Lord said this in Matthew 26, verse 24: “The Son of man goeth as it is written of him: but woe unto that man by whom the Son of man is betrayed! It had been good for that man if he had not been born.”

When the apostles were choosing the successor of Judas in Acts 1, they said that he might take part of this ministry and apostleship, from which Judas by transgression fell, that he might go to his own place. Where is his own place? It was a place of death, judgment, torment, and fire. Have you stopped to think about this? Judas got that which he wanted. If Judas could go back and change the direction of his life, he would, but it is too late. What is it worth to have your own way and lose your own soul? What is it worth to get what you want and die unconverted?

Secondly, the scribes, the Pharisees, the Sadducees, and the chief priests got what they wanted. They wanted Christ condemned and crucified. He was delivered into their hands and to their will. Peter, preaching on the day of Pentecost to those gathered in Jerusalem for the feast, said, “This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses.”

Therefore, being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, He hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear. For David is not ascended into the heavens: but he saith himself, The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, until I make thy foes thy footstool. Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ.

When they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, “Men and brethren, what shall we do?” Consider that question. They heard that this Jesus, whom they crucified, had been raised from the dead, had ascended into heaven, was seated at the right hand of God, and had all power

and authority. Then they asked, “Men and brethren, what shall we do?”

The Scripture says Pilate delivered Christ to their will. They did whatever they wanted to do to Jesus Christ. They mocked Him, railed upon Him, spat upon Him, smote Him, and crucified Him. He was scourged with a cat-o'-nine-tails and delivered into their hands. They did to Christ exactly what they wanted to do.

But Peter is preaching that the same One to whom they did what they wanted is now the resurrected, glorified, sovereign God of heaven and earth. Suddenly, they realize what they did to Him when He was in their hands, and they realize that they are now in His hands, and He may do to them what He wants to do. “Men and brethren, what shall we do?” They had crucified Christ, and Peter was preaching a sovereign, exalted, omnipotent, glorified Christ.

Now they realize He is in control. Is it worth facing the Judge of all the earth and the sovereign God of heaven and earth to get what you want and have your will? Those who play footloose and fancy-free with Christ will one day wish they had listened, obeyed, and submitted to the Lord of glory. You may get what you want now, but I can assure you it will cost you in eternity. Getting what you want is not all that matters. Here is a third application: sinners are miserable comforters.

Sinners Are Miserable Comforters

They only know how to sin and they only know how to act selfishly. Even when they try to do well, they only do it for their own sakes, their own glory, their own conscience, and their own reputation. It is not for Christ; it is not for His glory. All of those who love treason hate the traitor. It is impossible to please and satisfy the ungodly. Likewise, it is impossible to be spiritually comforted by the ungodly. For when Judas, in the depth of the torment of his conscience, stated, “I betrayed the innocent blood,” and threw down the blood money, they said, “Oh, what is that to us? See thou to that.” Sinners are miserable comforters.

Are you listening? Judas got what he wanted at the expense of Christ. The scribes, the Pharisees, and the priests got what they

wanted at the expense of Christ. Do you realize that Jesus Christ suffered for the sins of His people? When we want to sin, when we want to go contrary to the Word of God, we can do that. We will get what we want, but only at the expense of Christ, for Christ suffered for our sins.

Application: Sin Is at Christ's Expense

I do not want, and you should not want, anything at the expense of the person, work, honor, glory, and worship of Jesus Christ. Whenever we sin, it is at Christ's expense.

Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we ask for Your grace and Your mercy. We ask, Father, for Your help that we might be holy and godly, that we might live for Thee and glorify the sovereign, sinless Son of God. Make us more holy, more godly, more obedient, and help us not to do anything at the expense of Christ, but for His honor and glory. In Christ's name we pray, Amen.

CHAPTER 6

Adorning the Doctrine of God

Introduction: The Call to Adorn Doctrine

Titus 2:1–10 says: “But speak thou the things which become sound doctrine, that the aged men be sober, grave, temperate, sound in faith, in charity, in patience, the aged women likewise, that they be in behavior as becometh holiness, not false accusers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things, that they may teach the young women to be sober, to love their husbands, to love their children, to be discreet, chaste, keepers at home, good, obedient to their husbands, that the word of God be not blasphemed. Young men likewise exhort to be sober-minded, in all things showing thyself a pattern of good works, in doctrine showing uncorruptness, gravity, sincerity, sound speech that cannot be condemned, that he that is on the contrary part may be ashamed, having no evil thing to say of you. Exhort servants to be obedient unto their own masters, and to please them well in all things, not answering again, not purloining, but showing all good fidelity, that they may adorn the doctrine of God our Savior in all things.”

The title is “Adorning the Doctrine of God.” Hold Titus 2 and turn to Isaiah 53. Titus 2:10 says that they may adorn the doctrine of God. How could we possibly make such a wonderful doctrine more comely, more beautiful, and more appealing?

In Isaiah 53:2, in reference to Jesus Christ, the Scripture says, “For He, that is Christ, shall grow up before Him as a tender plant, and as a root out of dry ground.” “He hath no form nor comeliness, and when we shall see Him, there is no beauty that we should desire Him.”

Now ask yourself this question: If Jesus Christ is not beautiful and comely to the world in general, and the unsaved in particular, how may we adorn His doctrine and make Him beautiful?

The Meaning of 'Adorn' and the Theme of Titus

Titus 2:10 says, “Not purloining, but showing all good fidelity, that they may adorn the doctrine of God our Savior in all things.” The Greek word “adorn” is kosmeo, the verb form from which we derive our English word “cosmetics.” The noun is kosmos, most often translated “world” in the Bible. The kosmos is an orderly arrangement created by God. Thus, “adorn” means to adorn, garnish, put in order, arrange, make ready, and prepare; it is also used metaphorically to embellish with honor or to gain honor.

The theme of Titus is sound doctrine and good works. Throughout this epistle, the Apostle Paul emphasizes not only sound doctrine but also good works. His first reference to sound doctrine is in relation to an elder, in chapter 1, verse 9, where he says that the elder is to hold fast the faithful word wherein he has been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine.

The word “sound” occurs five times in this epistle: once in chapter 1, verse 9; again in chapter 1, verse 13; then in chapter 2, verse 1, in reference to Timothy; chapter 2, verse 2, in reference to older men; and verse 8 of chapter 2, in reference to young men. Since Paul has spoken of sound doctrine five times, we must ask how sound doctrine manifests itself. The answer is that sound doctrine always manifests itself in a demonstration of saving faith that issues in good works.

Titus 2:7 says, “In all things showing thyself a pattern of good works, in doctrine showing uncorruptness, gravity, sincerity.” Verse 14 says, “Who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto Himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.” Chapter 3, verse 8, says, “This is a faithful saying, and these things I will that thou affirm constantly, that they which have believed in God might be careful to maintain good works. These things are good and profitable unto men.”

Finally, in verse 14, Paul says, “And let ours also learn to maintain good works for necessary uses, that they be not unfruitful.” The theme of the book of Titus is sound doctrine and good works. Let me spell it out: men cannot see doctrine. However, they may see good works, which the doctrine produces. That is why Scripture says, “These things are good and profitable unto men.” Good works are not necessarily profitable unto God, although God has ordained them according to Ephesians chapter 2 and verse 10. They are not necessarily profitable unto God, but they are profitable unto men.

Sound Doctrine vs. False Doctrine

The apostle Paul begins by exhorting Titus to preach sound doctrine. Look in Titus 2, verse 1: “But speak thou the things which become sound doctrine.” The Greek word for “sound” is hygiano, which is translated as sound, whole, wholesome, healthy, safe and sound. Literally, Paul tells him to preach and to teach healthy doctrine, sound doctrine. It refers to preachers and Christians who are free from mixtures of error in their doctrine. That is, they are considered sound in the doctrines of grace. They are healthy in the Word of God.

Understand what Paul is doing in the book of Titus, and especially in chapter 2. After Paul tells Titus to make sure that he preaches and teaches sound, healthy doctrine, we see that sound, healthy doctrine produces not only good works, but godly works. There is a contrast given to us in Titus 1, beginning with verse 10. Here Paul is condemning the Judaizers. “For there are many unruly and vain talkers and deceivers, especially they of the circumcision,” that is, the Judaizers, “whose mouths must be stopped, who subvert whole houses, teaching things which they ought not for filthy lucre’s sake.”

"One of themselves, even a prophet of their own said, The Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, slow bellies. This witness is true, wherefore rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith, not giving heed to Jewish fables, and commandments of men that turn men from the truth. Unto the pure all things are pure: but unto them that are defiled and unbelieving is nothing pure; but even their mind and conscience is defiled."

"They profess that they know God; but in works they deny him, being abominable, and disobedient, and unto every good work reprobate." Why did they have wicked, vile works? The answer is that they had wicked, vile doctrine. The Judaizers taught a false, heretical doctrine, and consequently it led to an unholy life.

In chapter 2, Paul is telling Timothy to teach sound doctrine, healthy doctrine, because sound doctrine leads to a holy and godly life. The people must not only be instructed in the faith; they must also be holy in their lives. If you do not remember anything else today, remember this: the Apostle Paul is telling Timothy that principle and practice go together. If you believe correctly the principles of the Word of God, then your practice will be godly and holy. Biblical principles will always lead to biblical practice. Principles and practice go hand in hand.

Sound doctrine is not only contrary to the ancient heresies; it is also contrary to modern-day heresies. Paul talked in Titus chapter 1 about wicked teachers who were unruly, vain talkers, and deceivers, who subverted whole houses. They were interested only in money, interested only in fables, and spent their time enticing men and women into licentiousness, silly pharisaical legalities, antinomianism, and debauchery. That is not the thing to do. You do not teach heretical or mixed doctrine.

The Two Parts of Sound Doctrine

Sound doctrine really and truly consists of two parts. The first part magnifies the grace of God in Jesus Christ, from which we learn salvation. Secondly, sound doctrine produces a fear of God in our lives, which leads and directs us to bring our conduct into obedience to the law of God.

It is interesting what Paul is doing in Titus chapter 2. After he tells us in Titus chapter 1 what is produced by unhealthy, unsound doctrine—ungodly lives—he says that if we want to drive away all these fables, all this silliness and debauchery, we must teach sound doctrine. Once sound doctrine is taught, all the silliness and all the trifles will disappear. That is true. Sound doctrine will do one of two things: it will either drive away the silliness and wickedness in your life, or it will drive you away. Either way, there will not be any wickedness around in that sense of the word.

The Bible talks about people who had itching ears and heaped to themselves teachers who would scratch those itching ears. Sound doctrine will take care of those people, either by converting them or driving them away. That is for sure.

In Titus 2:1, Paul begins this chapter by exhorting Titus to preach sound doctrine. Notice how he ends the chapter in verse 15: "These things speak and exhort and rebuke with all authority. Let no man despise thee." Sound doctrine carries with it the authority of God. When sound doctrine is preached and taught, it also necessitates a biblical rebuke from time to time, because some refuse to hear the Word of God. Once you teach sound doctrine, if you need to rebuke someone, do so with all authority. Let no one despise thee. In other words, not only the preaching and teaching, but also the rebuking, are under the authority of God. Men and women are to recognize that authority, bow to it, and not despise the messenger, because the message comes from God.

The Apostle Paul basically says the same thing to Timothy as he does to Titus. In 1 Timothy 1:3, Paul tells Timothy, "As I besought thee to abide still at Ephesus, when I went into Macedonia, that thou mightest charge some that they teach no other doctrine." In other words, they are to teach only the pure Word of God.

Verse 4 says, "...neither give heed to fables and endless genealogies, which minister questions rather than godly edifying, which is in faith so do." Then verse 5 says, "...now the end of the commandment is charity out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned." In verse 3, Paul commands Timothy to preach sound doctrine and to make sure other preachers are not preaching anything else. In verse 4, he condemns fables and

endless genealogies. Then, in verse 5, we have the end of that commandment. What commandment? If we go back to verse 3, it is the commandment to teach no other doctrine. What is the end result of preaching sound doctrine? “Now the end of the commandment”—the commandment in verse 3 to preach sound doctrine—“is charity out of a pure heart and of a good conscience and a faith unfeigned.”

To understand verse 5, you have to turn it upside down, because Paul gives you the end first: “Now the end of the commandment is…” What does sound doctrine teach, and what is the proper order? Sound doctrine gives you an unfeigned faith—an unpretended, unhypocritical faith. According to verse 5, that faith gives you a good conscience. If you have a true, unhypocritical faith and a good conscience, what will that produce? Love out of a pure heart. Here it is: sound doctrine issues in practical, holy, godly living.

For instance, the chapter Paul gives us here in Titus 2 is very easy to follow. He shows us the result, or manifestation, of sound doctrine in the lives of believers in different and varying ages, steps, and walks of life. He speaks of aged men, aged women, young women, young men, and slaves.

Sound doctrine applies to each and every individual, regardless of what one's stage in life is and regardless of what one's status in life is.

Sound Doctrine Applied to Aged Men

Beginning with the aged men in verse 2, Paul shows how sound doctrine affects aged men, aged women, young women, young men, and slaves. After he tells them in verse 1, “But speak thou the things which produce sound doctrine or become sound doctrine,” ask yourself this question: How will sound doctrine affect aged men, aged women, young women, young men, and slaves? Paul answers every one of those questions and shows you, if you have sound doctrine in your life, how it will affect you. The word “aged” is presbytes, referring to an old man, a man of age, or an elder. Very obviously, an aged man is one who is materially different from a young man.

I am going to show you this from the Scripture in just a moment. But if aged men are sound in doctrine, that sound doctrine will manifest itself in certain characteristics in their lives. How will it manifest itself? Look in verse 2. First, they will be sober.

The Greek word for "sober" is nephileios, meaning sober, temperate, and vigilant. The word does not necessarily mean not drunk. Whenever we hear the word "sober," we automatically think of someone who is not drunk. However, you might include that in here because the word actually means to control oneself. It means that you maintain a temperate attitude in all things. In other words, an aged man who is sober is someone who does not go overboard in anything.

Not only that, notice secondly that the aged men are also to be grave. Aged men are to be sober and grave. The Greek word for "grave" is semnos, meaning august, venerated, honorable, and honest. An aged man who has sound doctrine in his life is someone who is going to be venerated for his character. It is sound doctrine that produces a noble, godly character. An aged man who is grave is someone who is noted for his integrity, his uprightness, and the principles that he holds in his life. So he says next in verse 2 that aged men are to be sober, grave, and temperate.

"Temperate" here has nothing to do with drinking alcohol. The word "temperate" is the Greek word sophron, which refers to one who is sober and discreet, one who curbs his desires and impulses. Let me put it like this: the word "temperate" here refers to someone who is in his right mind, someone who has a sound mind, someone who has his senses about him; someone who not only controls himself, but acts like he has good sense as well. So God is saying that for an elderly man, for an aged man, sound doctrine is going to be demonstrated in the fact that he is in control of himself, has character, and has good sense. He is sound in the faith.

That is the next thing there. Aged men are to be sound and healthy in the faith. That is, they are not weak and sickly. They are not dumb and ignorant. They are not lethargic and listless. They are not lifeless. They are full of life and strong in the doctrine and the things of God. Without me asking you to turn there, let me remind you that if you read 1 John chapter 2, you will find that John divides

believers into three categories. He talks about babes, young men, and then fathers.

Very obviously, a babe, say two years old, differs from a sixteen-year-old, and a sixteen-year-old differs from a fifty-year-old. The characteristics of a two-year-old are not the characteristics of a sixteen-year-old, and the characteristics of a sixteen-year-old are certainly not those of a fifty-year-old. I hope there are no fifty-year-old men or women who try to act like they are sixteen.

So he is just saying here that they are to be sound in faith. Notice, if you would please, in charity, verse 2. Charity, of course, is biblical love. Biblical love is that which is shown not only toward God, but toward others as well. You remember the passage in 1 John 5, verses 2 and 3: "And this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments, and His commandments are not grievous unto us." How do we know that we love God? How do we know that we love the brethren? By the fact that we act biblically toward them. We keep God's law toward them.

I do not covet what Henry has. I do not try to steal what he has. I do not try to harm his wife. I do not try to harm his children. As long as I act biblically and scripturally toward him, I love him. So this is what biblical love is. And then sixth, if you look, also, aged men are to be demonstrating sound doctrine in patience.

The word for "patience" is translated as patience, enduring, patient continuing, or patient waiting. It refers to steadfastness, constancy, and endurance. In other words, an aged man who is sound in faith will not forsake the faith or become upset simply because things are not going well in his life. His loyalty to his faith and his loyalty to the Word of God will not dissipate, even during the greatest trials and sufferings.

If an aged man has sound doctrine in his life, these are the characteristics that demonstrate that he is sound in the faith. If these things are not in his life, if he is an aged man, then he is not sound in his doctrine. Paul next shows how sound doctrine affects aged women. Notice that he uses the word "aged," not "older," and not "old."

Sound Doctrine Applied to Aged Women

He says, “The aged women likewise, that they be in behavior as becometh holiness, not false accusers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things; that they may teach the young women to be sober, to love their husbands, to love their children, to be discreet, chaste, keepers at home, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God be not blasphemed.”

First, aged women must be in behavior as becometh holiness. The word “behavior” refers to demeanor, deportment, and bearing. Their demeanor, deportment, and bearing must be holy. Holiness refers to that which is befitting toward God; it means reverent and submissive. An aged woman who is sound in the faith, first and foremost, is one whose very bearing demonstrates character, integrity, and consistency toward God and toward man alike.

Secondly, aged women are to be “not false accusers.” Interestingly enough, the Greek word for “false accusers” is diabolos, which is the word for “devil.” That is, aged women are not to be devils. How could the Bible say that? How could this be translated as “false accusers”? We must remember that Scripture teaches that the devil is the accuser of the brethren. He is a slanderer, an accuser, a liar, a sower of discord, and a disrupter—one who opposes God. What have aged women learned who are sound in the faith? They have learned that gossiping, lying, repeating tales, and spreading rumors and lies are completely out of conduct for a woman of faith. Let that sink in.

There are so many, and not just women unhappily, but so many who are willing to repeat every rumor that they hear and use their tongue for everything other than holiness and speaking that which is right. I never will forget what one preacher said. You would have to know the preacher. He was preaching in a church where there was a woman who was a known gossiper, known for her slanders and for spreading her rumors.

He preached hard against that. When he got through preaching, the woman came forward and said, “I would just like to put my tongue on the altar tonight.” He said, “Bless God, here's 50 feet of it. Put what you can on the altar and throw the rest in the corner.” He told her that. You're talking about long tongue.

Well, what's the Bible saying? An aged woman is not only someone who has behavior that becometh godliness, but one attribute of that behavior is that she is not a gossiper. She's not a devil. She's not a slanderer. She's not an accuser. Look in verse 3 again: "...that the aged women likewise that they be in behavior as becometh holiness, not false accusers, not given to much wine."

By the way, "not given to much wine" here, the Greek word is actually doulao, which literally means not becoming a slave to wine, or not being brought into bondage to wine. It's not that she cannot have some wine; the fact is that she cannot be in bondage to it.

If you look back in your Bibles to 1 Timothy chapter 3 and verse 8, you're going to see the same requirement in the life of a deacon. However, it is a little different word. "Likewise must the deacons be grave, not double-tongued, not given to much wine, not greedy of filthy lucre." Here the Greek word is prosecho, which has the import of being given to, attached to, addicted to, or devoted to. The concepts could really be the same, because if you're a slave to something, you're attached to it and devoted to it. But it's still a different word here.

Neither deacons nor aged women are to use wine as an excuse, nor are they to be at the point that they can't function without it. They're not to be slaves to it. They can do without it; they don't have to have it. An addiction to wine should never ever be a characteristic of an aged woman or of a deacon.

Paul is still telling us how sound doctrine affects the lives of aged women. In Titus 2:3 he says, "that the aged women likewise that they be in behavior as becometh holiness, not false accusers, not given to much wine," and then he says, "teachers of good things." The word is kalodidaskalos, and it literally means teaching that which is good, or teachers of goodness.

Ask yourself this question: If aged women are to be in behavior as becometh holiness, not devils, not addicted to wine, and teachers of good things, what good things are they to teach? Paul answers that question in verse 4: "that they may teach the younger women to be sober, to love their husbands, to love their children, to be discreet,

chaste, keepers at home, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God be not blasphemed."

Sound Doctrine Applied to Young Women

When you see the word "teach," you automatically think, or at least anyone who has ever had any Greek does, of the Greek word didasko, which simply means "I teach." But here the word is different. It is sophronizo, which literally means to be sober. Let me tell you what it literally means: it means to restore one to one's senses. So he says they may teach young women so that they may restore young women to their senses. Interestingly enough, the word "sober"—that they may teach young women to be sober—and the word "teach" are basically from the same root. The apostle Paul is saying that they must teach the young women to be in their right mind, or in their right senses.

Most young women rely on their emotions. Here is what the apostle Paul is saying: the older women have learned how to think. They have learned how to reason. They have learned how not to react and respond solely based upon emotions. Therefore, the older women are to teach the younger women not to be so emotional, but to think things through, to act upon reason and upon logic rather than emotions. Some of the aged women and men have told me how they responded to problems in their marriages in their early years. You would certainly never respond to those problems the same way now. Why? Because you are not acting on emotions now. You are acting more sensibly, more reasonably, and more logically. That is one of the things the older women are to teach the younger women: "that they may teach the young women to be sober, to love their husbands, and to love their children."

Is this not a strange exhortation to older women: that they must teach younger women to love their husbands and children? Is this not also a word of caution to younger women? According to the Apostle Paul, younger women have not really learned to love their husbands or children as they should. The Apostle Paul is telling us that real, genuine, spiritual love comes with age and maturity. It is only as we mature with each other that we genuinely learn to love each other. I have told Alice, and said it before: after forty-five years

of marriage, the way I love Alice now is a way I did not love her when we married. I thought I did.

Comparatively speaking, I do not believe that husbands and wives really begin to know what love is until after they have been married about thirty years—minimum. That is why the Apostle Paul says it is the older women who are to teach the younger women to love their husbands and their children: younger women really do not know what it means. And, by the way, aged men could teach younger men the same truth. Although God requires this here of the older women teaching younger women, certainly older men could teach younger men the same truth.

The older women are also to teach younger women to be discreet, chaste, keepers at home, good, and obedient to their husbands. Again, the word "discreet" is sophron, meaning to be of a sound mind, to be in one's senses, which leads to curbing one's desires and impulses—self-controlled and temperate. I find it absolutely amazing how God uses the same words repeatedly for men and women. We need to learn to have good sense, not to respond according to our emotions and impulses, and to think things through.

The younger women are also to learn chastity. Chaste refers not only to purity from carnality, but also implies and includes purity from all appearances of evil. It indicates an attitude and conduct in a woman that excites reverence and respect. A chaste woman is not one who merely keeps herself pure for her husband; she also communicates and exudes an attitude of chastity that demands respect. She is what we would call a good woman.

Most men can look at a woman and tell whether she is a good woman or a bad woman—not merely from her conduct or appearance, but from the attitude, disposition, and demeanor that come from her. Likewise, many women can tell the same thing about men. God says that older women are to teach younger women to be discreet in their minds, chaste, keepers at home, good, and obedient to their husbands. These are the things the younger women are to learn.

The Greek word for "obedient" here is hypotasso, which literally means to be under, to be subject to, to submit oneself to, and to be in subjection to. It carries the idea of yielding to one's authority, admonition, and advice. Hypotasso is actually a Greek military term referring to arranging troop divisions in military order under a military leader. In non-military use, it refers to a voluntary attitude of giving in, cooperating, assuming responsibility, and helping to carry a burden.

Look at verses 4 and 5, and ask yourselves this question: Why must aged women teach younger women "that they may teach the young women to be sober, to love their husbands, to love their children, to be discreet, to be chaste, to be keepers at home"? By the way, not only keepers at home, but how to keep the home. A lot of young women do not know that. Unhappily today, many do not even know how to cook, sew, clean house, or do any of those things. I think one standard requirement a young man ought to know about a young woman before he marries her is whether she can make buttermilk biscuits from scratch. If she cannot make biscuits, she does not know how to cook. But why should older women teach younger women these things?

Verse 5 says, "...to be discreet, chaste, keepers at home, good, obedient to their own husbands." Why? "...that the word of God be not blasphemed." The word blaspheme is blasphemeo, which literally means to speak evil of, to rail upon, to speak reproachfully, and to blaspheme. When our lives contradict the Word of God, we are blaspheming it—we are speaking ill and reproachfully of the Word of God. Older women teach younger women to bring their lives into conformity to the Word of God so that the Word of God may not be blasphemed. Why should elderly men help teach younger women or younger men? That their lives may not blaspheme the Word of God either.

This is the principle, whether we are speaking of aged men, aged women, young men, young women, or slaves: When our lives are contrary to the Word of God, we are blaspheming it. We are speaking reproachfully concerning it. What we want is for our lives to adorn the doctrine of God.

Sound Doctrine Applied to Young Men

Notice, thirdly, young men in verse 6. We have a couple of young men here today. In fact, we have more than a couple, especially in light of what I am going to share with you shortly. How is sound doctrine to affect young men? Watch this. He says in verse 6, “Young men likewise exhort to be sober-minded, in all things showing thyself a pattern of good works, in doctrine showing uncorruptness, gravity, sincerity, sound speech that cannot be condemned, that he that is on the contrary part may be ashamed having no evil thing to say of you.” Young men, then, are exhorted to be sober-minded.

That is the same word—listen carefully—that has been used in verse 4 and in verse 5. You are to be sensible, to be in your right minds, and to exercise moderation in all things.

Interestingly, the Apostle Paul addresses Titus as a young man. Timothy also was addressed as a young man. Both Titus and Timothy are referred to as Paul’s sons. They were his sons in the common faith; they were not physically his sons. In Titus 1:4, Paul writes to Titus, “to Titus, mine own son after the common faith.” Thus he refers to Titus as his son. If you go back to 1 Timothy 1:2, again Paul writes to Timothy, “unto Timothy, my own son in the faith.”

Then, in 1 Timothy 4:12, look what Paul tells Timothy: “Let no man despise thy youth, but be thou an example of the believers in word and conversation and charity and spirit and faith.” “In purity, till I come, give attendance to reading, to exhortation and doctrine.” Notice again that he says, “let no man despise thy youth.”

When Paul wrote Timothy and Titus, they were both preachers, undoubtedly in their thirties or forties, yet they were referred to as young men. The same word is used of Saul of Tarsus. In Acts 7:58, they laid down their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul. Saul, who became Paul the Apostle, was probably thirty to thirty-five at that time. When we come to Philemon 1:9, thirty years later, Paul is sixty to sixty-five and refers to himself as Paul the aged. How does that fit? Basically, anyone under fifty is considered a young man, and anyone over fifty is considered an aged man.

Even Christ did not enter the ministry until He was thirty years of age, because a person was not considered a man in those days until he was thirty. That is how the Apostle Paul could refer to someone probably in his forties as a young man, and how he could tell Timothy, “Let no one despise thy youth.”

Go back in your Bibles to Titus 2:7–8. I believe these verses were primarily aimed at Titus in the fulfillment of his ministry, but by implication they could also apply to any godly young man who has sound doctrine in his life. What will characterize a young man who has been under the influence of sound doctrine?

Verse 7 says, “In all things he will show himself a pattern of good works.” In other words, there is consistency and constancy in his life. In doctrine, there is uncorruptedness: he knows what the truth is and holds to the truth. Then there is gravity—being sober, sincere, real, and genuine. Notice verse 8: “sound speech.” That is speech that makes sense, used in agreement with and conformity to the Word of God, speech that cannot be condemned. No one can mock you for telling off-color jokes, using dirty words, or making filthy innuendos. No. It is sound speech that cannot be condemned. Why?

“That he that is on the contrary or different part may be ashamed,” and, as he says, “having no evil thing to say of you.” Someone could say, “James is a fine young man,” or, “George is a gracious young man,” or, “Eddie is a wonderful young man.” Here is that in their lives which adorns and glorifies the doctrine of God.

Sound Doctrine Applied to Slaves

The Apostle Paul is showing us the effects of sound doctrine in aged men, aged women, young women, and young men. Now, in verse 9, he says, “Exhort servants to be obedient to their own masters, and to please them well in all things, not answering again, not purloining, but showing all good fidelity, that they may adorn the doctrine of God our Savior in all things.”

When he says, “exhort servants,” these are not hired servants—men like someone coming to work for you tomorrow in exchange for fifty dollars. No. The Greek word is the word for slaves. Literally, he says, “exhort slaves to be obedient to their masters.”

God not only addresses men and women of varying ages and stages in life; He also addresses slaves.

Notice that He does not tell slaves to revolt against their masters. Rather, He tells them to honor their masters and obey them: “Exhort slaves to be obedient to their own masters.” The word “obedient” in verse 9 is the same word used for the wife in verse 5, who is to be obedient unto her husband. Slaves are those who have been subjected and put under authority. They are to make sure that they please their masters well in all things.

Moreover, he says, “not answering again.” They do not talk back, speak against, contradict, gainsay, or refuse to obey. What, then, are godly slaves to do? They are to please their masters, obey them, and please them well in all things. They do not talk back; they do what they are told and what they are asked. But look at verse 10. Verse 10 is not only a key verse; it is the source and title of this message.

Now remember, he is talking about slaves: “Not purloining, but showing all good fidelity or faith, that they may adorn the doctrine of God our Savior in all things.” Godly slaves are not to disgrace their masters; rather, they are required by God to honor them in all things, not talk back, not disobey, and not be guilty of purloining.

What is purloining? The Greek word is nosphizomai. That is a good word, isn’t it? Nosphizomai. It literally means to keep back, separate, divide, portion out, purloin, embezzle, or keep for one’s own personal use. Purloining is another word for stealing, fraud, or theft. Do you remember the passage in Acts 5? Do not turn there. Do you remember Ananias and Sapphira, who sold a certain piece of land and kept back part of it? They purloined. That is the word there. They kept back part. They pretended they had given everything to God, but they purloined; they reserved a portion for themselves. Purloining, then, is stealing, wastefulness, apportioning, and taking that which does not belong to you.

Purloining and embezzlement were so common among slaves that there was a proverb in those days: “He that will be rich must ask his servants leave.” In other words, you had to have permission from your slave to be rich because slaves were so known for their theft.

Now, I want you to look at this. This is the thing that caught my attention. After God speaks of aged men, aged women, young women, and young men, He now comes to slaves. Let us read verses 9 and 10 together: "...exhort slaves to be obedient unto their own masters, to please them well in all things, not answering again, not purloining, but showing all good fidelity, all good faithfulness, that they, the slaves, may adorn the doctrine of God our Savior in all things." What is he saying? He is saying that slaves who conscientiously discharge their duties in regard for God's honor and glory, who live holy, godly lives, are adorning and beautifying the gospel of God.

Application: Adorning vs. Blaspheming the Doctrine

Chrysostom, one of the early church fathers, said, "The heathen do not judge of the Christian's doctrines from the doctrine, but by his actions and by his life." Isn't it interesting that men will write, speak, and even fight and die for their religion? But how few will actually live for it. That is what the Apostle Paul is telling us: we may adorn the doctrine of God by our conduct, actions, and attitude, or we may blaspheme the doctrine of God. Slaves who rendered a gracious Christian obedience could adorn the doctrine of God. Please remember this: slaves in those days were the lowest of the low. You could not get any lower than a slave. If a slave could beautify and adorn the doctrine of God by his life and actions, how much more should aged men, aged women, young women, and young men be emboldened to live for Christ and adorn the doctrine of God?

Those people Paul referred to as servants were in actuality slaves—men and women bought with money, purchased just as one would purchase a horse, a cow, or an ox. They had a menial and lowly estate, yet they were to be an ornament of God's grace and adorn and glorify the doctrine of God by their obedience and submission, not only to their master but to the Word of God. If slaves were responsible to adorn the doctrine of God in their lowly and menial estate, how much more are you and I responsible to adorn the doctrine of God in our liberty and freedom?

Remember that the word "adorn" is the Greek word kosmeo, meaning to adorn, garnish, put in order, or make an orderly

arrangement. Metaphorically, it means to embellish with honor and glory. God is saying that we must put our lives in order by conforming them to the Word of God. As we conform our lives to the Word of God, our actions, conduct, good works, attitude, and dispositions beautify and adorn that doctrine, making it beautiful to the world and to unbelievers.

The question you have to ask yourself today is this: not just whether you are an aged man or aged woman, not just whether you are a young man or young woman, and not whether you are free or a slave. For your age, whatever that age is, and for your station in life, whatever that station is, are you adorning the doctrine of God, or are you blaspheming and reproaching the Word of God?

Why is Paul so conscientious about giving us the manifestation of sound doctrine? The answer is that he does not want the Word of God blasphemed. He wants our lives to adorn and beautify the doctrine of God. Would it not be wonderful if we had an entire generation of Christians who would beautify the Gospel of God?

If you want to know whether or not a church preaches or teaches sound doctrine, all you have to do is look at the lives of the people. Are the people holy? Are the people godly? Do the people want truth? Do they want to bring their lives into conformity to the Word of God, or do they do their own thing and live as they please?

Sound doctrine will always produce godly living. Unsound doctrine will always produce fleshly and worldly living. We want to beautify, not blaspheme, the doctrine of God.

Let us pray. Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we ask You today to teach us and build us up in the most holy faith. Help us, Lord, to beautify Thy doctrine, Thy gospel, by bringing our lives into conformity to Your Word. Does it matter if we are old or young, man or woman, bond or free? We have a responsibility not to reproach Thee, not to blaspheme Thee, but to beautify and adorn the grace of God in our lives through Jesus Christ.

CHAPTER 7

When Sacrifice is Sin

SCRIPTURE READING - Isaiah 66:1-5 (KJV)

Let us read Isaiah 66, verses 1 through 5. Isaiah 66, verse 1:

“Thus saith the Lord, The heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool. Where is the house that ye build unto me? and where is the place of my rest? For all those things hath mine hand made, and all those things have been, saith the Lord: but to this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word. He that killeth an ox is as if he slew a man; he that sacrificeth a lamb, as if he cut off a dog's neck; he that offereth an oblation, as if he offered swine's blood; he that burneth incense, as if he blessed an idol. Yea, they have chosen their own ways, and their soul delighteth in their abominations. I also will choose their delusions, and will bring their fears upon them; because when I called, none did answer; when I spake, they did not hear: but they did evil before mine eyes, and chose that in which I delighted not. Hear the word of the Lord, ye that tremble at his word; Your brethren that hated you, that cast you out for my name's sake, said, Let the Lord be glorified: but he shall appear to your joy, and they shall be ashamed.”

Review of Isaiah 66:1-2

> I want to call your attention simply for a moment to a review of verses 1 and 2, which I dealt with last time. I told you that there were a number of implications in verse 1. Without re-preaching those implications, first of all, I told you that God is. Nowhere in Scripture does the Scripture try to prove the existence of God. It just assumes it. Secondly, God has revealed Himself. Certainly, the Bible says, "Thus saith the Lord." So God has revealed Himself, not only in creation, but in special revelation, the Bible. Then, of course, I pointed out how God is sovereign and supreme. Heaven is His throne and earth is His footstool.

God is omniscient—that is, God is all-knowing—and God is omnipresent, everywhere present at one time in the totality of His being. God is also the absolute owner of everything. That is why He said, "For all those things hath mine hand made, saith the Lord." If heaven is God's throne and earth is His footstool, why in the world would God need anything that men could prepare for Him? Moreover, man cannot give to God that which already belongs to God. Since God created heaven and earth, if we were to try to give Him all of heaven and all of earth, we could only give Him that which is already His. Very obviously, everything that we could give God comes from materials that God has already created. Therefore, by virtue of creation, God already possesses them.

It is not beautiful and magnificent buildings that please God, but rather the individual who is poor, of a contrite heart, and trembles at the word of God. The word "poor" refers to the man who has absolutely nothing in himself. "Contrite" means smitten and afflicted. Here is a man genuinely afflicted and smitten because of his sins, rebellion, and wickedness. He is the one who says, "...and that trembleth at my word."

Scripture equates trembling with obedience. The man who trembles at the Word of God respects, hears, and obeys the Word of God, bringing his life into conformity to that Word. He recognizes the fact that it is the sovereign God of heaven and earth who gave that Word. Yet it is amazing, especially not only as you read Scripture but as you look around, to find a multitude who refuse to hear the Word of God and refuse to obey the Word of God, yet

nevertheless render some lip service to God or perform some type of ceremonial or ritual exercise to God.

Hypocritical Worship Condemned

Their attitude is simply this: “I don't really believe in God, but just in case, I'm going to do something religious just to cover my back.” In other words, it is merely lip service.

Isaiah 29:13 deals with individuals who give lip service to God while their hearts are far from Him: “Wherefore the Lord said, Forasmuch as this people draw near me with their mouth, and with their lips do honour me, but have removed their heart far from me, and their fear toward me is taught by the precept of men.”

Notice specifically what the Bible says. Here are people who try to draw near to God with their lips and mouths, but their hearts are far from Him. They do make a religious approach; they draw near with their mouth and honor Him with their lips. Yet their hearts have been removed far from Him. The precepts they believe about God have been received only from the mere teaching of men. In other words, their fear of God is taught by the precept of men. Simply put, God has never opened their eyes. God has never taught them. They are unconverted. They know about God intellectually, but they have no idea who God really and truly is.

In Mark 7:6, our Lord quotes Isaiah 29:13. He answered, “Well hath Esaias prophesied of you hypocrites, as it is written, This people honoureth me with their lips, but their heart is far from me.” Our Lord identifies the people described by Isaiah as hypocrites: their outward words honor God, but their hearts remain far from Him.

He goes further in verse 7: “Howbeit in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men. For laying aside the commandment of God, ye hold the tradition of men, as the washing of pots and cups: and many other such like things ye do.” Their worship is vain because they teach human commandments as doctrines and lay aside God’s commandment to hold the tradition of men. And He said unto them, “Full well ye reject the commandment of God, that ye may keep your own tradition.”

Our Lord said, "Well hath Esaias prophesied of you hypocrites." He designates the people who give Him lip service only as mere hypocrites. With their lives, they are making void the commandment of God. Why? They are refusing to obey God's Word while, at the same time, keeping their rituals, ceremonies, traditions, and anything and everything that might be religious. Our Lord says these people are very plainly hypocrites.

To understand the message, we must understand the context of Isaiah 66, verses 3 through 5. Since I have already dealt with verses 1 and 2, let me go back for one moment and connect verses 1 and 2 with the context. God is condemning a people who were trusting in the temple, and in the temple rituals and ceremonies. They were living the way they pleased, yet they went to the temple, performed the rituals, performed the sacrifices, went through the ceremonies, and, when they had done that, believed that they had pleased the One True and the Living God.

When they were going through their little lip service, their rituals, and their ceremonies, they were endeavoring to do what we call localizing God. The reason God said in verses 1 and 2 that heaven was His throne and earth was His footstool is that one implication is that God is omnipresent. That is, God is everywhere present at one time in the totality of His being.

But here is what these people had done: they had localized God. They had God contained in the temple. The temple was where God was. To their estimation and theology, God was not sovereign, God was not supreme, and God was not omnipresent. God was in the temple because that was where they went to worship Him, where they did their rituals, and where they did their ceremonies.

This is a totally and completely heathenistic and pagan concept. The heathen had a multitude of gods, and the reason they had a multitude of gods was that no one god of theirs was sovereign and supreme. Turn, if you would, to 1 Kings chapter 20. Let us begin reading there with verse 20. The Israelites are having war with the Syrians. Ben-Hadad, the king of Syria, has begun the war, and Ahab sends the young men out, and they slay the Syrians.

In 1 Kings 20:20, we read: "And they slew every one his man: and the Syrians fled; and Israel pursued them: and Ben-Hadad the king of Syria escaped on an horse with the horsemen. And the king of Israel went out, and smote the horses and chariots, and slew the Syrians with a great slaughter. And the prophet came to the king of Israel, and said unto him, Go, strengthen thyself, and mark, and see what thou doest: for at the return of the year the king of Syria will come up against thee. And the servants of the king of Syria said unto him, Their gods are gods of the hills; therefore they were stronger than we; but let us fight against them in the plain, and surely we shall be stronger than they."

Now skip down to verse 28: "And there came a man of God, and spake unto the king of Israel, and said, Thus saith the Lord, Because the Syrians have said, The Lord is God of the hills, but he is not God of the valleys. Therefore will I deliver all this great multitude into thine hand, and ye shall know that I am the Lord."

What did the heathen say? "God might rule the hills, but He cannot rule the valleys. One God cannot rule everything; He cannot possibly be sovereign." God said, "I am going to destroy the Syrians again because they think that I am a poor, anemic, limited God like their false idols."

When you try to localize God, to have Him in a little capsule or confined in a little space, that is pure heathenistic and paganistic philosophy. That same concept is alive and well today. Most people think they have God contained in a church building. Therefore, they go to church on Sunday, sit there, smile, look syrupy sweet, and go through their ritual and ceremony. Then they go out and, Monday through Saturday, live the way they please without any thought to God or reference to His Word.

They think they have God contained in that building on Sunday. On Sunday they are good and do what they are supposed to do; during the week they live the way they want to live. What are they doing? They are denying the sovereignty, supremacy, omniscience, and omnipresence of God.

Such worship is absolutely unacceptable. It is paganistic. Those who foolishly try to worship God in that way, thinking that He

accepts their worship when they know they are offering it from a faint and hypocritical heart, are only deceiving themselves. God does not care for that kind of worship. God said, “It is to this man that I’m going to look: the man that is poor, the man that has a contrite heart, and the man that trembles at my word.” Yet people somehow think they can fool and deceive God by offering Him totally unacceptable worship.

Since people truly do not believe God or His Word, they are ignorant of the principle revealed in Proverbs 21:27: “The sacrifice of the wicked is abomination: how much more, when he bringeth it with a wicked mind?” God says, first and foremost, that the sacrifice of the wicked is unacceptable. He will have nothing to do with the wicked and will not receive anything from his hand. But how much worse is it when he brings it with a wicked mind and still thinks God will receive it?

The Declaration: Sacrifice as Sin

Now, there are three simple points to see. First, the declaration in verse 3 must be understood in light of verses 1 and 2: “He that killeth an ox is as if he slew a man; he that sacrificeth a lamb, as if he cut off a dog’s neck;”

"he that offereth an oblation, as if he offered swine's blood; he that burneth incense, as if he blessed an idol. Yea, they have chosen their own ways, and their soul delighteth in their abominations."

When the wicked seek to bring sacrifice or worship to God, it is unacceptable. When he does so with a wicked mind, it is doubly and completely unacceptable. In fact, it is blasphemous. It is idolatry. God declares such worship no better than idolatry, for it is idolatry. They are not worshiping the one true and the living God. They are worshiping a God of their imagination.

Now listen carefully. All worship or all sacrifice that is not rightly offered is unacceptable. What do I mean when I say all worship not rightly offered? When we worship God, we must worship Him first of all with a due sense of sin. We're sinners. We're wicked. We've sinned against God. Along with that due sense of sin, there must be

genuine godly sorrow for it and repentance for that sin. And thirdly, that worship must be offered in faith through the Lord Jesus Christ.

God cried out against ritualism and ceremonialism, and I'm going to include another word, churchism, all through the Bible. Over and over, God said, I'm not satisfied with just mere ceremonies. I want you to see how God has consistently cried out concerning this false and unacceptable worship.

Isaiah chapter 1, verse 10: "Hear the word of the Lord, ye rulers of Sodom; give ear unto the law of our God, ye people of Gomorrah." Now he's talking to Israel, and yet he's calling them Sodom and Gomorrah. Look what he says in verse 11: "To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? saith the Lord."

"I am full of the burnt offerings of rams, and the fat of fed beasts; and I delight not in the blood of bullocks, or of lambs, or of he goats. When ye come to appear before me, who hath required this at your hand, to tread my courts? Bring no more vain oblations; incense is an abomination unto me; the new moons and sabbaths, the calling of assemblies, I cannot away with;"

God says, "it is iniquity, even the solemn meeting. Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hateth: they are a trouble unto me; I am weary to bear them. And when ye spread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you: yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear: your hands are full of blood."

Who was it that appointed these feasts, holy days, sabbaths, and sacrifices? It was God. God appointed every one of them. Yet they brought these sacrifices and this worship in direct disobedience to His Word. God says it was totally and completely unacceptable: "I'll not hear it. I'll not have it. I will not receive it."

Amos chapter 5 states it even more clearly concerning their worship: "I hate, I despise your feast days, and I will not smell in your solemn assemblies. Though ye offer me burnt offerings and your meat offerings, I will not accept them: neither will I regard the peace offerings of your fat beasts. Take thou away from me the noise of thy songs; for I will not hear the melody of thy viols. But let judgment run down as waters, and righteousness as a mighty stream."

If you understand Isaiah 1 and Amos chapter 5, you understand how the people were going through mere rituals and ceremonies while giving worship to God out of feigned, hypocritical lips, hearts, and minds. Then you will understand Isaiah 66:3. Here is what such worship is like unto God: "he that killeth an ox is as if he slew a man." An ox was given for sacrifice, but God says that he who kills an ox is as if he slew a man.

Murder is a violation of the sixth commandment. The context indicates a very special kind of murder. In the Old Testament, some of the children of Israel offered their children in sacrifice to Moloch. Men and women were also sacrificed to false idols, which the Bible extremely condemns. God condemns ritualistic, ceremonial murders to appease the gods. Israel had come to the place where they slew an ox.

It was as if they had murdered a man. Let us suppose that Ed pulls out a pistol and murders Don. That is bad. We say, “Ed must have really hated Don to have murdered him.” But it is not merely that he hated Don; he hates God. Do you know what murder is? Man was created in the image of God. When you murder a man, you attack the image of God in that man. Thus, God equates it with an attack upon Himself. That is why God says, “He that killeth an ox is as if he murdered a man.” In other words, God says, “I view this as a personal attack against me.”

I title this message, “When Sacrifice is Sin.” Here are people sacrificing, and they said they were sacrificing to God. But God said, “I do not accept it. I will not have it. It is sin. It is an attack upon my person.” Their lives did not back up their profession. Read Isaiah 1 and Amos 5. In each instance when God refuses those offerings, sacrifices, and worship, He is saying, “Your life is totally and completely contrary to my word.” When you try to worship God with a heart that is empty and in rebellion against Him, an ox is as if you slew a man. Look in verse 3: “He that sacrificeth a lamb as if he cut off a dog's neck.”

In the Old Testament, there was not only the Passover lamb but also the lamb for the daily sacrifice. It does not matter which lamb you are talking about. God says any lamb slain for sacrifice would be to Him as if he cut off a dog's neck—in other words, as if he cut off a

dog's neck and then offered the dog on the altar to God. To offer a dog in sacrifice to God would be abominable.

It would be something that any Israelite simply could not stomach or stand even to think of, because the dog was held as an unclean animal. But to the pagans, the dog was venerated. In Egypt, it was not only dogs but cats who were venerated and worshipped. Herodotus, an early historian, says concerning the Egyptians, and I am quoting, “in some cities, in the Egyptian cities, when a cat dies, all the inhabitants cut off their eyebrows. When a dog dies, they shave the whole body and the head.” Why? They worshipped and venerated cats and dogs.

You understand what I am saying. Here is something totally and completely unacceptable to God. God states in verse 3 of Isaiah 66 that the spirit, disposition, and attitude with which they sacrificed a lamb was as hateful in His sight as if they had sacrificed a dog. In other words, God was not pleased at all with their worship. He would have none of it, because that worship came from feigned and hypocritical lips.

Notice next what he says in verse 3: “He that offereth an oblation as if he offered swine's blood.” The oblation was the meal offering, made of fine flour, on which oil was poured and frankincense was sprinkled, according to Leviticus chapter 2 and verse 1. Yet now what God says is this: No matter how rightly composed this oblation or meal offering is, it does not matter that you brought the finest of the finest of the meal, or that you have the oil and the frankincense in the proper amounts. God says it is no more esteemed in His sight than if the worshipper had offered swine's blood. According to Leviticus chapter 11, swine, or pig or hog, was not only unclean to the touch and for eating, but certainly for worshiping God. God said, “I'll not have it.”

All of this goes back to the heart, or to the disposition, spirit, or attitude. Here were people whose lives were absolutely contrary to God, yet at the same time they were trying to worship God. God says, “It's as if you're offering swine's blood to me.” Look what else he says in verse 3: “He that burneth incense as if he blessed an idol.” Incense was burned as a memorial for mercies. It was offered in thankfulness for mercies received and was constantly and continually burned as a

remembrance offering—to keep in the mind the remembrance of God and all of His multitudinous mercies. Now God says, “he that burneth incense as if he blessed an idol.” In other words, the man was not genuinely thanking God or genuinely remembering God. How could he? His life was completely contrary to the commands of God. Consequently, God says, “I'll not have it.”

I hope you see that what God condemned in Israel of old, He likewise condemns today. You have multitudes of people who are interested merely in rituals and ceremonies and in going to church. So many think that if they come in and sit on a pew, sing a few songs, put a few quarters in the offering plate, and listen to a fifteen-minute sermon, then they have worshiped God. That is not true, because worship is more than external.

Do you remember what our Lord said in John 4:24? He said, "God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth." First of all, if there is not the realm of truth, if there is not His Word, it is not worship. Secondly, if man's spirit, if man's heart, is not involved, it is not worship that is acceptable unto God. God says, on the one side, there must be truth; on the other side, the heart must be involved in that truth. It is like David said in Psalm 103:1: "Bless the Lord, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless his holy name." It is not just that we bless the Lord with truth; we do so with all that is in us.

Notice what God says in Jeremiah 7:22: "For I spake not unto your fathers, nor commanded them in the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt, concerning burnt offerings or sacrifices: But this thing commanded I them, saying, Obey my voice, and I will be your God, and ye shall be my people: and walk ye in all the ways that I have commanded you, that it may be well unto you."

"But they hearkened not, nor inclined their ear, but walked in the counsels and in the imagination of their evil heart, and went backward, and not forward." God said, What did I tell you when I brought you out of the land? I told you I wanted, first and foremost, your obedience—a loving, submissive obedience.

Each of us should remember the truth that Samuel enunciated to King Saul. In 1 Samuel 15, God sent Saul to slay all the Amalekites

and destroy everything. Yet Saul and the people spared Agag, the king of the Amalekites, and the best of the sheep and oxen. When Samuel approached, Saul said, "Blessed be thou of the Lord: I have performed the commandment of the Lord." About that time, something went ba-moo. Samuel said, "Saul, if you've obeyed God, what meaneth then this bleating of the sheep in mine ears, and the lowing of the oxen which I hear?"

Saul answered, "The people spared them, that we might sacrifice them to God." Then Samuel gave these classic words: "Hath the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry." The punishment for witchcraft was death; the punishment for idolatry was death. Samuel told Saul, "Because thou hast rejected the word of the Lord, he hath also rejected thee from being king."

So when God declares in Isaiah 66 and verse 3 that such worship and sacrifice are unacceptable, He is saying, your worship, your sacrifice is totally and completely unacceptable unto me.

Isaiah 66:3 gives the reason their sacrifice was totally unacceptable: “Yea, they have chosen their own ways, and their soul delighteth in their abominations.” They had not chosen God's ways; they had chosen their own. Moreover, their soul delighted in their abominations.

The Delight: Choosing Their Own Ways

Do you remember when Joshua brought the people across the river? He told them in Joshua 24:15, “And if it seem evil unto you to serve the Lord, choose you this day whom ye will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.”

Make up your mind whom you are going to worship. Are you going to be heathenistic? Are you going to be pagan? Or are you going to be Christian? Without the grace of God, without the mercy

and power of God in our lives, every one of us would choose the pagan gods. It is only God's grace that has brought us to His truth.

The word “delighteth” in Isaiah 66:3 means to take pleasure in, to delight in, and to look upon with favor. These people not only chose that which was wicked and wrong, but they delighted in it. They liked it, wanted it, and enjoyed it.

Isaiah 65:12 says, “Therefore will I number you to the sword, and ye shall all bow down to the slaughter: because when I called, ye did not answer; when I spake, ye did not hear; but did evil before mine eyes, and did choose that wherein I delighted not.” God said, You did not choose what I delighted in; you chose what you delighted in, and I do not delight in that which you delight in. Therefore, I will measure you to the sword. In Proverbs 1:29, God again says, “For that they hated knowledge, and did not choose the fear of the Lord.” Man by nature will not choose the way of the Lord.

The same condemnation against sinners appears in the New Testament as in the Old Testament. In Romans 1, God condemns sodomy, fornication, and all kinds of wickedness. Romans 1:32 says, "Who knowing the judgment of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them."

Isn't that interesting? Even the judgment of God, apart from the grace of God, is insufficient to convert anyone. Some say, "What we need in this country is a good dose of God's judgment." We are already getting a pretty good dose of it, and it is probably going to get worse. But judgment without mercy will only lead to destruction.

These Israelites not only chose what was contrary to God in His Word, but delighted in their abominations. The word "abominations" in the Hebrew refers to detestable things, that which is abominable and filthy. It is also a word for idols. They delighted in their idolatry, in the abominations and filthiness of idolatry. The Israelites in Isaiah 66 were vicious and immoral in their conduct; they chose the way of sin rather than the way of God's commandments. They took pleasure in provoking God and in doing that which was offensive to Him.

Then they came and offered a sacrifice, and that made their sacrifice totally unacceptable to God. Their lives were completely contrary to what they were saying in worship. What they were doing was an affront and an insult to God, a denial of His sovereignty, omniscience, and omnipresence. He knew what they did, what they were, and what they thought.

Yet they came around trying to fool Him. They could not fool God. Isaiah 66:4 says, "I spake, but they did not hear: but they did evil before mine eyes, and chose that in which I delighted not." They did evil before His eyes. In other words, they did not really believe that God could see them or would know what they were doing.

Or if they did, they certainly did not care what he saw. The very fact that he was God did not deter them at all. How in the world could they expect their sacrifices or their worship to be acceptable unto God when their lives were completely contrary to the Word of God? Let me tell you something, folks: it is a serious sin to affront God. It is a serious sin to insult God.

You know what He said in John chapter 5? Listen carefully: “He that honoureth not the Son honoureth not the Father.” You insult Jesus Christ, you insult God the Father. You dishonor God the Son, you dishonor God the Father. And here these people were delighting in that which was an affront to God, and a denial of His person and His attributes.

The Delusions: God's Retribution

Now let me ask you a question: Will God allow such to go on? The answer is no. Look, if you would, at verse 4, because now I want you to see the delusions. You have seen the declaration and the delight; now the delusions. God says, “I also will choose their delusions, and will bring their fears upon them; because when I called, none did answer. When I spake, they did not hear: but they did evil before mine eyes, and chose that in which I delighted not.”

To me, this is exceedingly frightening. God said, “I also will choose their delusions, and will bring their fears upon them.” Are you listening? When men will not believe the truth, they will believe a lie. If men will not listen to the sovereign God of heaven and earth,

then to whom will they listen? Think about this. If God is not your ultimate, if God is not your sovereign, if God is not your source of authority, then may I ask, who is? If you are not going to listen to God, to whom then will you listen?

Well, let me show you. In Deuteronomy 32, verse 17, we read: "They sacrificed unto devils, not to God; to gods whom they knew not, to new gods that came newly up, whom your fathers feared not." And then he says, "Of the Rock that begat thee thou art unmindful, and hast forgotten God that formed thee." If you will not listen to God, you are going to listen to false gods. You are going to listen to devils. You are going to listen to error and heresy.

"And he ordained him priests for the high places, and for the devils, and for the calves which he had made." This is talking about Jeroboam, son of Nebat. Notice: he ordained priests for the high places, for the devils, and for the calves which he made. If you will not listen to God, to whom will you listen? Look in Psalm 106 and verse 37. Watch this declaration. Since you will not sacrifice to God, since you will not listen to God, here is the result. In fact, let us read verse 36: "And they served their idols: which were a snare unto them. Yea, they sacrificed their sons and their daughters unto devils, And shed innocent blood, even the blood of their sons and of their daughters, whom they sacrificed unto the idols of Canaan: and the land was polluted with blood. Thus were they defiled with their own works, and went a whoring with their own inventions."

Interestingly enough, God says that if you will not listen to Him, you are going to listen to a devil. You are going to listen to an idol. Look in your Bibles to Isaiah 44 on your way back to Isaiah 66. Isaiah 44, verse 20: "He feedeth on ashes." I said earlier, if you will not believe the truth, you will believe a lie. Then it says, "a deceived heart hath turned him aside, that he cannot deliver his soul, nor say, Is there not a lie in my right hand?" A deceived heart has turned him aside. Let me quote Obadiah 1 and verse 3: "The pride of thine heart hath deceived thee." Men who will not hear God will hear devils. Those who refuse to listen to the Word of God will listen to wicked, deceitful hearts.

False prophets, deceivers, and evil spirits will lead them astray. One is either going to walk in truth or walk in error. There is no truth

outside of the Word of God. All those who refuse to bow to the Word of God, in essence, will bow to error, heresy, lies, and deceit. I want you to turn to 2 Timothy chapter 3. I am sure you are familiar with this passage. Let us begin reading there with verse 1. Why are there so many people deceived? I am going to answer that for you in just a moment. The Bible says, “This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come.”

Paul describes men as “lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, Without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, Traitors, heady, highminded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God; Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away.” He says that they creep into houses, lead captive silly women laden with sins, are ever learning, and are never able to come to the knowledge of the truth. As Jannes and Jambres withstood Moses, so do these resist the truth: men of corrupt minds, reprobate concerning the faith.

If you resist the truth, if you will not have the truth, the only thing left is error, a lie, and a deceit. Notice what God said in Isaiah 66: “I also will choose their delusions, and will bring their fears upon them.” It is absolutely amazing that those who will not hear the Word of God consistently will very quickly, easily, and readily listen to false prophets. People will not listen to the truth, and yet they will listen to lies on a regular basis.

Look how quickly the people in the days of Jesus Christ listened to the scribes, Pharisees, and Sadducees and refused to listen to Christ. Our Lord said in John 5:43, “I am come in my Father's name, and ye receive me not: if another shall come in his own name, him ye will receive.” Preachers who try to build up, glorify, and honor Jesus Christ and preach the Word of God have small works, while preachers who try to glorify themselves and deceive the people have a large following. Why? When people will not believe the truth, they will believe error.

This is another example of what is known as the Lex Talionis of Scripture, simply Latin for the law of retribution. God makes the punishment fit the crime. When He says, “I will also choose their

delusions, and will bring their fears upon them," He is saying, "I will be no kinder to them than they are to me." They choose to mock and deceive Him; then He chooses their delusions and brings their fears upon them. They had their way in how they treated the Lord, and now the Lord says, "I'll have my way in how they're treated."

He will make them perish by their mockeries. He will always do it according to His Word. Let me show you. I want you to turn to Leviticus 26 and then Deuteronomy 28. Turn, if you would please, to Leviticus 26. Leviticus 26. Let us begin reading there with verse 16. I could read practically the whole chapter, but look in Leviticus 26 and verse 16. Leviticus chapter 26 and verse 16. Look what God says. 26 and verse 16. When they refuse God's law, when they refuse God's commandments, when they refuse God's word, God says, this is what's going to happen. This is what is going to happen.

"I also will do this unto you; I will even appoint over you terror, consumption, and the burning ague, that shall consume the eyes, and cause sorrow of heart: and ye shall sow your seed in vain, for your enemies shall eat it. And I will set my face against you, and ye shall be slain before your enemies: they that hate you shall reign over you; and ye shall flee when none pursueth you."

"And if ye will not yet for all this hearken unto me, then I will punish you seven times more for your sins." By the way, look in verse 19: "and I will break the pride of your power." Turn to Deuteronomy 28, verse 66. Notice that whatever God chooses, He is going to do it according to His law. This is still the curse for disobeying God: "And thy life shall hang in doubt before thee; and thou shalt fear day and night, and shalt have none assurance of thy life: In the morning thou shalt say, Would God it were even! and at even thou shalt say, Would God it were morning! for the fear of thine heart wherewith thou shalt fear, and for the sight of thine eyes which thou shalt see. And the Lord shall bring thee into Egypt again with ships, by the way whereof I spake unto thee, Thou shalt see it no more again."

"And there ye shall be sold unto your enemies for bondmen and bondwomen, and no man shall buy you." That is, no man shall redeem you out of that bondage. Go back in your Bibles to Isaiah 65. Look at verses 11 and 12. We read verse 12 earlier, but not in the context of verse 11: "But ye are they that forsake the Lord, that forget

my holy mountain, that prepare a table for that troop, and that furnish the drink offering unto that number." That is, those idols.

"Therefore will I number you to the sword, and ye shall all bow down to the slaughter: because when I called, ye did not answer; when I spake, ye did not hear; but did evil before mine eyes, and did choose that wherein I delighted not." God said, You chose to mock Me; now I shall mock you. You chose to try to deceive Me; now you shall be deceived. You chose to delude Me; now I shall choose your delusions. God said, I am going to number you to your enemies and destroy you.

Someone may say, "I am glad I did not live in Old Testament times. God was just, and He really dealt with those people." May I remind you that God is immutable? God does not change. The lex talionis, the law of retribution, does not change. He said, "You chose to try to deceive Me. You chose to try to delude Me. Now, says God, I shall choose your delusions." He will bring their fears upon them.

New Testament Confirmation

The same principle is applied today as it was in Isaiah 66. When people choose their own ways and prefer their will above God's will, their word above God's word, and think they can fool God, God will choose their delusions. You say, "Show me that in the Bible." Thank you for asking. Turn to 2 Thessalonians chapter 2. Here it is stated very plainly, beginning with verse 10: "And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved." They did not want truth. Verse 11 says, "And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: That they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness." The word "delusion" in the Greek is the word "plane."

This refers to one who is led astray, one who holds an error, one who holds a fraud, one who believes a deceit. God says, because they refuse the truth, "I will send them a strong delusion." Notice four things. First, this is an act of God. Verse 11 says, "And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion." So this is a work of God. It is something that God does. God sends a strong delusion. Secondly,

there is a cause for His sending that delusion: they believe not the truth, but have pleasure in unrighteousness. Thirdly, the consequence is that those who refuse to believe the Word of God will believe a lie. Fourthly, the ultimate result is that those who believe a lie will be damned. Wow. You want to know where most people are today? They are deluded and deceived because they refuse to believe the truth.

Applications and Warnings

Let me make a couple of applications. The first one is very simple. In Isaiah 42:8, God declares, “I am the Lord: that is my name: and my glory will I not give to another, neither my praise to graven images.” Notice what God says: “I am the Lord: that is my name: my glory will I not give to another, neither my praise to graven images.” God will brook no rivals. It does not matter whether it is a man or an idol that seeks to claim God’s glory and seeks to promote its own sovereignty and its own supremacy over the one true and living God. That man or idol shall be destroyed, because God is God alone. Men may like playing God, but they shall be destroyed by the One True and Living God for their play-acting.

Secondly, we must understand that those who delight in what is contrary to God shall be deceived by their delights. God is going to choose their delusion; He will see to it that they believe a lie. Do you realize that it is a dangerous game to play with God? Yet many think they can win a game with God. How many think, listen now, that although they live like hell on earth, somehow they are going to end up in heaven when they die?

Church attendance and profession do not excuse sinful living. The Israelites went to the temple too. Many think it does not really matter how they live, just so they have made a profession. They believe God will not judge them, or will make an exception for them; they think they will escape and get by with their sins. God may punish others, but somehow He will let them by. The truth is, they are deceived, and all who are deceived believe a lie.

Unless they repent, they will perish in that deceit. The third application is very easy: all hypocrisy is open and known by God. You cannot fool God. The Bible says, "the hope of the hypocrite shall

perish." His hope is that God will not find him out, that he did not really mean what he said when he worshipped God and when he sacrificed to God, because in reality, he was going to live the way he wanted to live anyhow. The hypocrite's hope shall perish.

There is a time when sacrifice is sin. There is a time when worship is sin. If you think you can delude God and get away with it, you are already deluded yourself.

Father, we ask in the name of Jesus Christ that You would show us and teach us the importance of Your Word, the necessity of not only believing it but obeying it, and constantly and continually bringing our lives into greater conformity unto it.

Lord, there are so many things we do not know. Open our eyes. Teach us. Show us. As David prayed, "Lord, those things which I see not, teach thou me." Give us grace that we may serve Thee acceptably with reverence and godly fear. In the name of Jesus Christ, we ask and pray. Amen.

CHAPTER 8

The Role of Books in the Life of the Man of God

The Man of God and His Books

I want you to open your Bibles to 1 Timothy chapter 4. The subject that I have been asked to deal with is the man of God and his books. Beginning with verse 12:

"Let no man despise thy youth; but be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity. Till I come, give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine. Neglect not the gift that is in thee, which was given thee by prophecy, with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery. Meditate upon these things; give thyself wholly to them; that thy profiting may appear to all. Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee."

I call your attention particularly to verse 13, where the Apostle Paul tells Timothy, "Till I come, give attendance to reading, to exhortation, and to doctrine." The Apostle Paul's admonition to

Timothy, “Give attendance to reading,” falls on deaf ears today. Hardly anyone reads anymore, even pastors. We live in a day in which we have classified most things as amusement.

Introduction: The Neglect of Reading

As you read the word “muse,” M-U-S-E, in the Bible, understand that it means to think, meditate, or contemplate. When you put the alpha, or the “A,” in front of it—“amuse”—it means not to think or contemplate. Certainly, that is what we have today. We have amusement parks. We have television, which is amusing in the sense that you do not have to think, period. Most people today do not even read their Bibles, and unhappily, sometimes that is true even of pastors.

I heard recently from a believer who was a doctor. When he was a young man, he seriously considered the ministry and asked his pastor, "Why are you in the ministry?" The pastor thought for a moment and said, "Well, it's a good job." The man went on to say that his denomination sent the pastor outlines for each Sunday. He simply looked over the outlines, filled in a few things, and preached whatever the denomination sent him.

Obviously, for him there was no need to study, read, or do anything. There is a vast difference between a ministry and a job, and also between having been called into the ministry and entering the ministry as a profession. I would never put up with some of the things I've put up with for the last 47 years if God had not called me into the ministry.

I have a very dear pastor friend, and he and I are alike in many ways. He married a woman named Alice, as did I. He had all daughters, and I had all daughters. We both went to Bob Jones at the same time. Our senior year, we both had mononucleosis—but we never kissed each other. I know it is called the kissing disease, or the teenager's disease, but we did not do that. We are alike in so many ways that it is unbelievable.

He always kids with me because he studies incessantly as well. He says, "Brother, I've got this thing figured out. We need to find a large congregation that likes these 15- or 20-minute sermonettes. We can

take one outline, break it down, and preach a month from one sermon. We would never have to study again or repeat a message because we would have a lifetime of messages." Then we laugh, because we both know that we can never cease studying or preaching.

Years ago, when I turned 62, one of the men in our church said, "Well, Pastor, I guess this means that you can retire now." I said, "Yes, sir."

Truly, when you think of books, studying, and reading, you must understand that we must be selective, because certainly we cannot read or study everything. Solomon was certainly right in Ecclesiastes chapter 12 and verse 12 when he said, “And further, by these, my son, be admonished: of making many books there is no end; and much study is a weariness of the flesh.” There are indeed many books, and some of them are absolutely, totally worthless. Anyone can say anything in a book, and just because someone writes a book does not necessarily mean that he is correct or that there is truth or accuracy in it. Study is hard work; it is wearing to the flesh, and that is probably one reason why many people do not engage in it. Do you realize that it is much easier to visit, fellowship, talk, play, and sometimes even pray than it is to study?

I had a pastor many years ago. My wife and I were both saved under his ministry. He was one of those unique individuals whom you could not help but love or like. Yet I have seen him at midnight on Saturday night, trying to find something—anything—to preach on Sunday morning. When he finally left that church, which had been built basically upon his personality, the church split three times. There was no doctrine, no understanding, and no consistency in his preaching and teaching. But you could not help but like him and love him.

Whenever we read outside the Word of God, we want to make sure that such reading is worthwhile and useful. One quick illustration will suffice. Years ago, when I first started preaching, I wanted to learn all I could about how God miraculously and sovereignly delivered the children of Israel from Egypt. I wanted to read about how God opened the Red Sea and how the children of Israel went across on dry ground.

I was excited when I found a book on the Exodus. I thought, “This is it,” so I bought the book. It was in a Christian bookstore and written by a supposed Christian. I opened it and began reading, and immediately discovered that I had not only wasted my money but was wasting my time. The author said Moses and the children of Israel crossed because they knew when the tide would be out. Pharaoh and all his hosts did not understand the tide tables; they tried to cross while the tide was coming in, and they were drowned. When I looked at that book, I thought, “What a farce!”

What a blatant denial of Scripture. So I followed the admonition of Scripture and burned the book. Acts 19:19 says, “Many of them also which used curious arts brought their books together, and burned them before all men: and they counted the price of them, and found it fifty thousand pieces of silver.” Some books are absolutely, totally worthless. Spurgeon, in his book Commenting on Commentaries, says of one book, “This book is an absolute must for handmaidens who wish to start good fires each morning.” Unhappily, there are many such books today.

Our forefathers were widely read—in fact, far more widely read than you and I are today. They understood that each subject was important because God created everything, and therefore everything had theological implications. Do you remember the names Frank and Jesse James? Their father, Robert James, was a Baptist preacher. I have three messages on the world in the times of Jesse James, and I encourage you to listen to them. You will probably discover that Jesse and Frank James were quite different from Hollywood’s presentation and from what we have been taught. I mention this to show how well read not only their father was as a Baptist pastor, but also Jesse and Frank James were. When Robert James’s will was probated in Clay County, Missouri, in 1851, his library listed fifty-one books dealing with mathematics, chemistry, philosophy, theology, astronomy, grammar, history, literature, Greek, Latin, public speaking, and many other subjects.

Robert James was one of the founders of William Jewell College in Liberty, Missouri, and was also on the board of trustees there. Jesse James was fond of quoting the Bible. In fact, J. A. Dacus, who was a neighbor of theirs, said that Jesse's Bible was so underlined

that you could hardly read it. Jesse quoted the Bible. Frank quoted Shakespeare.

Here is the point: you cannot quote if you do not read. In 1851, these so-called outlaws, who really and truly were made outlaws by the government, were forced into what they were doing. You need to read that and hear that. But these were men who were well-read. Jesse James was a member of the Baptist Church.

He sang in the choir. He taught Sunday school. His favorite hymn was "What a Friend We Have in Jesus." What I am trying to show you is this: what we need in this time today is an awakening much like the Reformation, when learning and Christianity were both revived at the same time. The Reformers always combined deep study with active ministry, and these two truths must go together.

Primarily, consider verse 13. Look at what Paul said to Timothy in 1 Timothy 4 and verse 13: "Till I come, give attendance to reading, to exhortation and to doctrine." The first point is to consider the admonition linguistically. When he said, "Till I come, give attendance," like the Apostle Paul, our obligation is to study so that we can keep nothing back that is profitable. We certainly understand 2 Timothy 3 and verse 16: "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works."

The Admonition Considered Linguistically

All Scripture is given by inspiration of God. That means each word is inspired and, therefore, very profitable. If we look into it, we must understand what the words actually mean. Consider the word “attendance.” The Greek word is prosecho, which literally means to have to or towards. It conveys the ideas of giving attention, taking heed, cleaving unto, turning the mind unto, being given over to, and being addicted to. Literally, Paul tells Timothy, “Till I come, be addicted to reading. Give your mind over to reading. Turn your mind over to reading.”

The same idea appears in 1 Corinthians 16:15, where the Apostle Paul says, “I beseech you, brethren, (ye know the house of

Stephanas, that it is the firstfruits of Achaia, and that they have addicted themselves to the ministry of the saints).” They have addicted themselves to the ministry. The same thing is implied here: become addicted to reading.

While Paul commands Timothy to give attention to reading, he does not specify what kind of reading. “Give attendance to reading” is a present active imperative in the Greek, meaning that it is a continual command and that one is to be personally active in it. Yet he does not necessarily specify whether it is public or private reading. We must remember that both the Old and New Testaments included public reading of the Word of God.

For instance, Nehemiah 9:3 says, “And they stood up in their place, and read in the book of the law of the LORD their God one fourth part of the day; and another fourth part they confessed, and worshipped the LORD their God.” They stood in their place and read in the book of the law of the Lord one-fourth part of the day. That was public reading. In Acts 13:15, Paul and Barnabas entered a synagogue, and the Scripture says, “And after the reading of the law and the prophets the rulers of the synagogue sent unto them, saying, Ye men and brethren, if ye have any word of exhortation for the people, say on.”

I have threatened for years to preach a message on this text called “The Mistake of a Great Rabbi.” Can you imagine anyone being so silly as to ask the Apostle Paul if he had anything to say? Read the rest of the chapter. He started at the beginning, preached, and gave them a complete history lesson. But here, after the reading of the Law and the Prophets, in Acts 15:21, we read: “For Moses of old time hath in every city them that preach him, being read in the synagogues every sabbath day.”

In both the Old Testament and the New Testament, there was a public reading of the Word of God. While I certainly believe that the Word of God should be read publicly, in this context the emphasis appears to be on private reading.

Paul tells Timothy, “Till I come, give attendance to reading.” He is telling him to give close attention, turn his mind to, and be addicted to reading. Consider not only the phrase linguistically, but also

contextually. When the admonition to give attendance to reading is taken in its context, it is obvious that it applies to private reading. Moreover, the phrase specifically applies to the Word of God, though it has other implications as well.

The Admonition Considered Contextually

If you read the Scriptures frequently, consistently, and prayerfully enough, you will understand what that old black preacher in South Georgia meant when he said that their Bible should have shed a whole lot of light on their commentaries. That is a fact. Read the Bible, and you will find that it sheds an awful lot of light on many things you read.

Look at the context. In verse 13, Paul says, “Till I come, give attendance to reading, to exhortation, and to doctrine.” Exhortation and doctrine naturally follow reading. Paul was writing to Timothy, a young preacher, and giving him sound pastoral advice. You cannot teach or communicate anything that you do not know. Reading must absolutely come first. Yet it is not reading for reading’s sake; it must be sound, serious, and useful reading. Paul knew Timothy’s diligence, yet he recommended that Timothy diligently and personally read the Scriptures. Pastors, regardless of their age, must always be students.

The Pastor as an Example

I have known men who thought, “I have arrived. You cannot teach me anything. I know it all. Don’t even try.” It is not just preachers; it is Christians. They say, “I can recite the Westminster Confession and Catechism, the Philadelphia Confession and Catechism, and the Heidelberg Catechism. I know all of this.”

We are never too old to learn. I have learned things here this week. I am older than many of you, but I have learned. We must always be students. How shall pastors be able to teach other people unless they are willing to learn themselves? If a great man such as Timothy was advised to study and read personally, how much more do you and I need to take that advice?

Calvin said on this verse, “Lest it should be thought that careless reading was enough, he at the same time shows that it must be explained with a view to usefulness when he enjoins him to give earnest attention to doctrine and exhortation, as if he enjoined him to learn in order to communicate to others. It is proper also to attend to this order, that he places reading before doctrine and exhortation. For undoubtedly, the Scripture is the fountain of all wisdom from which pastors must draw all that they place before their flock.” The primary emphasis, then, is on reading first.

Secondly, Timothy was to set the pace and be an example for believers. Verse 12 says, “Let no man despise thy youth; but be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity.” Timothy was to be an example in personal study, conduct, love, faithfulness, and purity. To be an example in all those things, he first had to be a personal example in the private study of Scripture. By implication, he would also be an example in other studies beyond Scripture. Paul issued this command. He was exceedingly well read and had a multitude of other books.

Paul as an Example of a Reader

How do we know that? The answer is that the Bible tells us. For instance, in Acts chapter 26 and verse 24, Paul was before Festus, speaking concerning Christ, when Festus cried out, “Paul, much learning doth make thee mad.” Paul was a very highly educated individual. He not only knew the Scriptures, but also knew about pagan cultures and pagan writings because, at least on two occasions, he quoted them. In Acts chapter 17 and verse 28, the Apostle Paul was preaching on Mars Hill.

There were all those philosophers, the Stoics and the Epicureans. The Apostle Paul said, “For in him we live, and move, and have our being; as certain also of your own poets have said, For we are also his offspring.” Notice that he was quoting their poets. In the book of Titus, chapter 1 and verse 12, the Apostle Paul said, “One of themselves, even a prophet of their own, said, The Cretians are alway liars, evil beasts, slow bellies.” But notice the words, “one of themselves, even a prophet of their own.” So here the Apostle was quoting these pagans.

He had read enough to know what they said and what they did not say. The Apostle Paul also specifically asked for books. In 2 Timothy chapter 4 and verse 13, he wrote, “The cloke that I left at Troas with Carpus, when thou comest, bring with thee, and the books, but especially the parchments.” It is impossible to know exactly, or to determine exactly, what books are meant here by the Apostle Paul. They could have been portions of the Old Testament. They could have been classical books or classical writings, books written by other Christians, or books written by the Apostle Paul himself.

But it is noteworthy that the Apostle Paul did not normally travel without books. He wanted his books with him. This shows not merely that he knew the Scriptures, but that he had read widely enough to recognize the words and writings of pagan poets, to use them accurately, and to know what they said and what they did not say. The man who traveled and ministered without being separated from his books understood their value in the work of God.

He says, “Bring me the books, but especially the parchments.” The word for parchments here is “membranas.” It is where we get our English word “membrane,” and it occurs only here in the New Testament. The parchment, or membrane, usually was made from dressed animal skins, and these parchments seemingly were something different from the books. There have been a number of suggestions. Some have suggested that they were the Apostle’s original writings, his own journals, letters from other churches, or even his original manuscripts in which he wrote to the other churches.

I do not know, and no one can tell conclusively exactly what these books were. But the truth is that the Apostle Paul wanted his books and his parchments. Have you ever considered where the Apostle was when he asked for his cloak, his books, and the parchments? He was in prison—not only in prison, but looking toward his death. He was going to be beheaded, yet he was not going to waste any time. He was going to read and study in prison while waiting for death.

Here was the great Apostle Paul in prison saying, “I want my books.” He tells Timothy, “Give attendance to reading. Pay attention to it.” Paul himself was giving young Timothy an illustration.

John Calvin says it like this: “It is evident from this that the Apostle had not given over reading, though he was already preparing for death. Where are those who think that they have made so great progress that they do not need any more exercise? Which of them will dare compare himself with the Apostle Paul? Still more does this expression refute the madness of those men who, despising books and condemning all reading, boast of nothing but their own divine inspirations. But let us know that this passage gives to all believers a recommendation of constant reading that they may profit by it.”

There are those who ask why they should fritter away their days over books when knowledge comes in a flash, as the Apostle Paul was caught up in the third heaven. But if you are looking for flashes from heaven, you will spend a lifetime waiting. After all, even Paul was caught up; nevertheless, he told Timothy to read and Carpus to bring him his books.

Have you ever stopped to think how we have lost the art of reading? Do we do everything else but read? You have heard it for years: He who can read and will not read is no better off than him who cannot read.

Do you know why those Reformers and our forefathers were such erudite men? They read. They studied. They were taught. You have to consider this not only linguistically, but contextually as well. In this context, the Apostle Paul is telling Timothy that it is private reading.

The Admonition Applied: Reading Beyond Scripture

Thirdly, consider the admonition applicatorily. The command is to give attendance to reading. How do we apply that command? Do we simply read our Bibles and let that be it? I understand that nothing can replace the Bible. The Scripture says, "Behold, who teacheth like God?" But do you realize that, as I read the passage from Ephesians chapter 4 the very first night, and as it was read again, he gave some pastor teachers? What do pastor teachers do? They teach. They communicate the Word of God.

If a pastor writes something theologically, correctly, and biblically, is what he writes not the same as what he preaches? It is

still truth. You would not do away with pastor-teachers' writings. So why would you say, "I'll just read the Bible and let everything else go"? True, our first focus must be upon the Word of God. But God did indeed give some pastor teachers, and we may learn by reading as well as by listening.

Books do not necessarily have to be theological in order to be good. I do say this: our books, whatever the subject, should be written from a theological perspective, because God is sovereign and God is the Creator. We should understand everything from a theological perspective—that God is indeed sovereign.

One book that I found of great value, and that I have recommended over the years, is The Central Significance of Culture by Francis Nigel Lee. I recommend that you get it if you can. In that little book, there is a little paperback quote about this thing. Francis Nigel Lee demonstrates very effectively that we have been called to dominion, and it is our responsibility to bring every aspect of our culture into submission to Jesus Christ.

Have you ever read a medical book? You say, "Why would I read a medical book?" Let me ask you: how did our forefathers take care of themselves? There were no hospitals. When you live out in the country as far as Alice and I do, you had better learn to take care of yourself. We have books on suturing and dentistry. I can pull a tooth if I have to. I have never done it, but I have the implements to do it. I have gone to a class to learn how, and I have books explaining everything.

If I had to do it, I would do it. Have I ever sutured animals? Yes. Have I ever sutured men? Yes. How did I learn that? I have my books, my wife has her books, and then we have our books. We've got books everywhere.

Before I preach this message, I was thinking: if you try to slip up on us at night and make it into the house successfully, we do have a pit bull. If you make it past the Glocks, shotguns, and rifles, don't come up on Alice's side of the bed, because you'll trip and break your neck. She's got books all there. We've got books everywhere, and on every subject.

I have many books. How many? I honestly do not know. Let me tell you something funny. I did very well in school until the tenth grade. Then I got so bored because everything was just repetition. In the eleventh grade, the only book I took home was my chemistry book. In the twelfth grade, I took no books home and did no studying; I didn't have to. It was just repetition, the same old stuff.

When I graduated from high school, I promised myself that I would never read another book as long as I lived. I may not have exactly fifteen thousand books in my library, but I've got pretty close to it, and I've read—I have no idea how many books. I have many history books. I love history. You know why?

Because history is nothing less than the outworking of God's eternal decree in time, if you want to know God's eternal decree, study history. If you want to see the hand of God outstretched against his enemies, study history. If you want to see the hand of God stretched out in redemption for his people, study history. You ought to know something about biblical philosophy, too, and how completely contrary it is to pagan philosophy.

Unless you understand this clear distinction, you're going to be engulfed in pure humanistic hogwash given to you every day of your life, without even understanding that it is anti-God and anti-Bible philosophy. You ought to read and find out. You ought to find out about money. I've got books on economics, and you'll find that most people have no idea what money is. I will guarantee you there are probably only two or three people in this room who know what a dollar is.

You say, "Well, there it is right there." That's not a dollar. That's a Federal Reserve note. A dollar is a unit of measurement, like an inch, a foot, or a quart. A dollar is a measurement in silver or gold. Do you realize there are plenty of verses and chapters in the Bible that teach biblical economics? What about government? What about education?

What about biology, the study of life? What about music? What about business? Any field that you can possibly think of has books written about it from a biblical perspective. If there are not any, then you ought to write one.

Let me be reasonable. If I can take a book and read it in two days, learning what it took the author twenty years to learn, am I better off? I don't have to go through nineteen years, 358 days, or whatever it is. I've got what it took him nearly a lifetime to learn; I've gleaned it now in two days.

Principles for Profitable Reading

The problem is this, folks: in order to benefit from our reading, whether it is our Bible or other books, we've got to remember two truths. The first is that more depends upon quality than quantity. I know that all of God's Word is quality; I understand that. But do you realize most people read the Word of God as if it were a magazine to be devoured all at once?

What people really want to do is brag about the fact: “Do you realize I read twenty chapters today?” Or, “I read two whole books today.” Let me tell you something: if I am studying Scripture, I would rather read one paragraph in the Bible and understand it than read twenty chapters and not understand a thing that I have read.

There is nothing wrong with quantity as long as you do not sacrifice quality. Likewise, when it comes to modern theological books, I would rather read one old Puritan book than twenty modern-day books. In my forty-seven years of preaching, I have purchased, burned, thrown away, and discarded a lot of worthless, useless books.

You say, “Brother Weaver, how have I not experienced that? I do not want to waste my money.” If you are talking about books, I think the first thing you should do is ask your pastor about the book. Your pastor probably has more books than you do anyhow—not necessarily all the time, but usually he does. Secondly, research the author and the publisher, if possible. Thirdly, if possible, peruse the book before you buy it. Look at the table of contents, the author, and all about it. Read the foreword.

Fourthly, I am afraid that when it comes to book buying, experience only comes with time and money. But if you can ask someone, ask someone. With as many history books as I have in my library and as many as I have read, I have occasionally called Brother

Charles Baker and asked him about a book: “Is this a good book? Do you recommend this book? What do you know about this book?”

Quality is what counts first and foremost. Secondly, more depends upon the use of what we read—that is, how, by reflection and meditation, we apply what we read in our daily lives and conduct. Dr. Watts says it like this: “A well-furnished library and a capacious memory are indeed of singular use toward the improvement of the mind.

But if all your learning be nothing else but a mere amassment of what others have written, without a due penetration into its meaning, and without a judicious choice and determination of your own sentiments, I do not see what title your head has to true learning above yourselves.

You can read all you want to read, but if you cannot digest it, come out and express it in your own language, and apply it to your life, it is worthless. It is true, simply stated: if whatever you read does not make sense to you, if you cannot understand it, if you cannot comprehend it, and if you are not able to make applications of that truth, all you have is what you started with, and that is nothing.

This principle is shown in Mark chapter 4, beginning with verse 23: “If any man have ears to hear, let him hear. And he said unto them, Take heed what ye hear: with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you: and unto you that hear shall more be given. For he that hath, to him shall be given: and he that hath not, from him shall be taken even that which he hath.”

Let me put it very pointedly. If you do not use the truth, you lose the truth. If you cannot take the truth, apply it, and make it yours, you really do not have the truth. You will forget it. It is just that simple.

Charles Bridges said this concerning the Christian ministry: “Not to read or study at all is to tempt God. To do nothing but study is to forget the ministry. To study only to glory in one's knowledge is a shameful vanity. To study in search of means to flatter sinners, a deplorable prevarication, but to store one's mind with the knowledge proper to the saints by study and prayer, and to diffuse that

knowledge in solid instruction, practical exhortation. This is to be a prudent, zealous, and laborious minister."

Now consider an obvious application to young preachers and young scholars. I am sure there are young men here who not only preach, but some who may even aspire to preach. The Apostle Paul says in First Timothy chapter 4, verse 12, "Let no man despise thy youth; but be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity." Every congregation wants an experienced man. Then comes a young pastor.

Application for Young Preachers

He has never really pastored. He has preached a little bit, but he has never really pastored. So the congregation says to the young man, "I'm sorry, we're looking for someone with experience," and the young man counters, "Well, how can I get experience if nobody will ever let me preach?"

How do you overcome things like that? Here you are, sixteen, seventeen, eighteen, or twenty-five years old. It doesn't matter. You think you have a lot to say, while the old heads sit around thinking, "You're a kid. What do you know?" Look at what he said in verse 12: "Let no man despise thy youth." How does one cease from being despised as a youth or as a novice? First of all, the word "despised" is kataphroneo in the Greek, and it literally means to be held in contempt, to be disdained, to be despised, or to be thought little of or nothing of.

How do you prevent that? Here is what he tells you: "Let no man despise thy youth." But before reading the rest of that, did you know the Apostle Paul wrote Timothy in 2 Timothy chapter 2 and verse 22 and told him, "Flee also youthful lusts"? Timothy was probably in his forties when Paul told him to flee youthful lusts. You have to remember that, in those days, even our Lord did not begin His ministry until He was thirty. Someone in his thirties or forties was considered nothing but a youth. Paul was telling Timothy to flee these youthful things and lusts. Timothy, you are a young man, a young preacher; but if you are going to overcome your youth, look at verse 12: "Let no man despise thy youth."

"But be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity. Till I come, give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine." In other words, you may be a young man, but if you give attendance to reading, apply that reading to your life, and become an example in word, conversation, charity, spirit, faith, and purity, and if you can stand your ground theologically, emotionally, rationally, and simplistically, the old heads will stop disdaining you and say, "That kid has something to say. Look at his life. Listen to his arguments." How? Because he reads and studies.

Now, I want to show you something. It will not be an easy road. Look in verses 15 and 16 at what Paul tells Timothy: "Meditate upon these things; give thyself wholly to them; that thy profiting may appear to all."

"Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee." Now go back. He says in verse 15, "Meditate upon these things; give thyself wholly, totally, completely unto them."

My work is my hobby, and my hobby is my work. I love it. I enjoy it. My wife always complains that all I ever want to do is study. Every time we go somewhere, she says, "You want to stay in the motel and read?" Yes.

Rush Dooney was a personal friend of mine. My wife and I have been in his home multitudes of times, and he has been in ours. Rush Dooney read a book every day. I never will forget the first time I went to his home. His couch was in front of a coffee table piled that high with books. You could not set a cup of coffee on it if you wanted to. Each side of the sofa had piles of books, every chair had piles of books, and when you excused yourself and went to the bathroom, you could barely get to the commode because there were piles of books on each side. Wherever he was, he was reading. He usually read three or four books at one time, and he never forgot what he read.

I never will forget the last summer before he died. He told me, "John, my body—I've got diabetes, I've got this, I've got that. But my mind is just as clear as ever." He said, "Just last week, I thought of a

book I read in 1935. Would you believe I went to my library, pulled that book off the shelf, and opened it to the very page that the quote was on that I was thinking of?" He remembered a book he had read in 1935. I would not even have remembered that there was a book written in 1935. He read incessantly, completely, totally. When I first went to visit him, probably in the seventies, he had about 50,000 books in his library.

If you ask him a question, his answer would be like this: "Well, to understand that, you've got to go back to 1845 when..." He would bring you all the way up until that particular day.

Books give us knowledge. When we stay in our studies, our profiting will appear to all. When we take heed to ourselves and to our doctrine, we will be able to take heed and help others as well. We have to understand that our books are our teachers.

Conclusion: Books as Indispensable Tools

A carpenter cannot work without his tools. A mechanic cannot work without his tools. Neither can a preacher or a student work without his books. We have a mechanic to whom we take our car. You pull up in his garage, and there are tools everywhere. He does not use all those tools at once, but he has them there whenever he needs them.

You say, "What if I bought five books from Brother Baker right now? Would I have them read by tonight?" No.

I might start reading one of them; the others are going on my shelf. But I know what is in those books and what they are about. When I need them, I can go to my shelf, pull them off, and begin reading and studying. It is like a mechanic having a tool on the shelf: when he needs it, it is there. If you do not have books, you do not have tools with which to teach. My books are my teachers, and you will never grow unless you read and study.

What did the Apostle Paul tell Timothy? "Let no man despise thy youth; but be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity. Till I come, give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine." If you want to exhort, teach, or communicate, you must read and be able to discuss many different subjects. Do not ever let a wicked, ungodly reprobate

know more than you do. Outstudy him so that you can refute his errors, heresies, and wickedness. Let no man despise thy youth. Father, help us. Teach us.

CHAPTER 9

Mad at Christ

Luke chapter 6, beginning with verse 6:

"And it came to pass also in another Sabbath, that he entered into the synagogue and taught: and there was a man whose right hand was withered. And the scribes and the Pharisees watched him, whether he would heal on the Sabbath day; that they might find an accusation against him. But he knew their thoughts, and said to the man which had the withered hand, Rise up, and stand forth in the midst. And he rose and stood forth.

"Then said Jesus unto them, I will ask you one thing; Is it lawful on the Sabbath days to do good, or to do evil? to save life, or to destroy it? And looking round about upon them all, he said unto the man, Stretch forth thy hand. And he did so: and his hand was restored whole as the other. And they were filled with madness; and communed one with another what they might do to Jesus."

Introduction: The Blasphemy of Being Mad at Christ

What an absolutely blasphemous and horrible attitude and act! How could anyone be angry and upset with the sinless Son of God, who is love, mercy, and grace personified? And yet, truthfully, there are

multitudes who are mad at Christ. Many who harbor such rage and ill will are atheists and infidels of all persuasions—all who fight against Him, are enraged with Him, and seek to overthrow His kingship and His kingdom.

It is amusing that many who deny the existence of God fight most vehemently against Him. If they really believe that He does not exist, why waste their time fighting against Him? The truth is that all their vitriolic messages, anger, and fighting reveal that deep down they genuinely believe that He is and that He exists. If they did not believe that, they would not be fighting. Sadly, however, many professing Christians are also mad at Christ.

It seems that when His will and His plans cross their wills and their plans, they are angry. I have known Christians, and many people who have lost a loved one, who became angry with Christ. I remember one man who had been married for probably over fifty years. His wife died in her eighties, and he told me, “It’s not fair that God took her.” I thought, What do you mean, it’s not fair? God gave her to you for over fifty years. You are not even thankful for fifty years? People are just angry with Christ.

In our context, it is the religious leaders who are angry with Christ. If you read through the New Testament, you will always find that our Lord’s mortal enemies were the religious leaders. The Sadducees controlled the temple, while the Pharisees controlled the people, and they gave Christ the most trouble. The Herodians joined in with them as well.

The Meaning of 'Madness' in Luke 6:11

Luke 6:11 says, “...and they were filled with madness, and communed one with another what they might do to Jesus.” The word “madness” is very unique. It refers to madness, folly, a lack of sense, rage, and insanity. This madness or rage is closely connected with insanity. The Greek word anoius literally means a lack of sense; the word nous means literally mind. When you put an “a,” or an alpha, in front of it, it means that someone is basically out of his mind, does not have a mind, or is not capable of thinking. Thus, the word denotes the senseless rage and confusion to which our Lord put His enemies by both His words and His deeds.

Their insanity, madness, and rage led them to want to do something to Jesus, and I am sure that something was not very nice. Over and over in the Scriptures, they tried to kill Him. Scripture says that our Lord's enemies watched Him: "And the scribes and the Pharisees watched Him, whether He would heal on the Sabbath day, that they might find an accusation against Him."

They Watched Him to Destroy Him

The word "watched" here has the connotation of watching insidiously and maliciously. That is, they watched Him with an evil intent in order that they might destroy Him. Mark 3:1–2 says, "And he entered again into the synagogue, and there was a man there which had a withered hand. And they watched him, whether he would heal on the Sabbath day, that they might accuse him."

The same thing appears in Luke 14:1: "And it came to pass, as he went into the house of one of the chief Pharisees to eat bread on the Sabbath day, that they watched him." Isn't that amazing? Then Luke 20:20 says, "And they watched him, and sent forth spies which should feign themselves just men, that they might take hold of his words, that so they might deliver him into the power and authority of the government."

They watched Him as a lion does its prey, waiting for the opportunity to pounce and destroy. They watched Him that they might accuse Him, condemn Him, and destroy Him. They did not watch to learn. They did not watch to edify themselves. They did not watch to honor and glorify God for all the works that were performed. No, they watched Him that they might destroy Him.

So you have to ask yourself this question: Why were our Lord's enemies so insanely angry and upset with Him? Stop and think about this. If we can find out what upset our Lord's enemies so much, we can also find out why our Lord's enemies are still so angry against His people.

You remember what our Lord said in John 15:18? "If the world hate you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love his own. But because you're not of the world, but I've chosen you out of the world, therefore the world

hateth you." Then He said, "Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than his Lord."

They Could Not Contain Him

"If they have persecuted Me, they will also persecute you. If they've kept my saying, they will keep your saying also." But notice what our Lord said: "If the world hates you, you know that it hated me before it hated you." Our Lord is saying that there is going to be a connection between the hatred of the world toward Him and the hatred of the world toward His people. If the world is angry with Christ, it will certainly be angry with us as well. We as Christians are hated basically because Christ is hated, and because we believe what Christ believed.

There should be an absolute, total difference between the saved and the unsaved. We are not like the unsaved, and therefore that difference causes a great deal of anger. Why, then, were our Lord's enemies so viciously and maliciously mad and angry toward Him? Here is the first reason for their anger: They could not contain Him.

Reason 1: They Could Not Contain Him

Our text in Luke chapter 6 makes this truth very clear. It was the Sabbath day. They could not keep Christ within the confines and traditions of their belief system. They had a different belief system concerning the Sabbath day. Their view of the Sabbath day was entirely different from our Lord's view. Their view consisted of legalism and traditionalism; thus we get the word Pharisaism.

Luke chapter 6, beginning with verse 1: "And it came to pass on the second Sabbath after the first, that he went through the cornfields, and his disciples plucked the ears of corn, and did eat, rubbing them in their hands. And certainly the Pharisees said unto them, Why do you that which is not lawful to do on the Sabbath days?"

"And Jesus answering them said, Have you not read so much as this what David did when himself was hungered, and they which were with him? How he went into the house of God, and did take and eat the showbread, and gave also to them that were with him, which

is not lawful to eat, but for the priests alone. And he said unto them that the Son of Man is Lord also of the Sabbath."

It was a Sabbath day, and verse 6 says, "and it came to pass on another Sabbath." All of these things are happening on the Sabbath day.

In the first five verses, our Lord and His disciples go through a cornfield. They get the grain in their hands, rub it, removing the chaff, and eat it. The Pharisees ask, “Why is it that you're doing that which is not lawful to be done on the Sabbath days?” The question is, unlawful according to whom? It was unlawful according to their tradition and interpretation; it was not unlawful according to the law of God.

Look in your Bibles to Deuteronomy 23:25. The law of God perfectly allowed what Christ and His disciples did: “When thou comest into the standing corn of thy neighbor, then thou mayest pluck the ears with thine hand, but thou shalt not move a sickle into thy neighbor's standing corn.” All He is saying is this: if you are walking through your neighbor's cornfield and want to take a bite, take a bite. Get a handful of it. But you cannot harvest his grain for him. You cannot steal it. It is lawful to get something to eat, but it is not lawful to steal.

Our Lord did not even quote Deuteronomy 23:25. He reminded them what happened in 1 Samuel 21. When David and a few of his men had escaped from Saul, they came to Ahimelech the priest. David asked, “Is there anything to eat?” He said, “Here's the bread, the showbread that just came out from the presence of God.” Fresh showbread had been put in, and the priests alone were allowed to eat it. David said, “Give it to me.” The priest said, “Well, if the men have at least kept themselves from women,” and David said, “That's the truth.” So he gave David and the men the bread, and they ate it.

Now look at what our Lord said in verse 3: “And Jesus answering them said, Have ye not read so much as this, what David did, when himself was an hungred, and they which were with him? How he went into the house of God, and did take and eat the shewbread, and gave also to them that were with him, which is not lawful to eat but for the priests alone.” Then He said, “That the Son of man is Lord

also of the sabbath." In other words, a greater than David is here. He is not subject to the interpretations or traditions of man. He is the Lord of the Sabbath.

He's the one that created everything. He's the one that ordained the law. The thing that upset the Pharisees so often was that they could not contain Christ. They could not stop Him from violating their interpretations of the Sabbath. They could not stop Him from abrogating and nullifying their traditions. Our Lord consistently did that which is right and biblical and that which was according to God's law. So frequently, therefore, He crossed man's law and man's interpretation of it to the chagrin and the dismay of the Pharisees.

Now let me just show you how this upset them. I want to show you four quick passages. Look in your Bibles to Matthew chapter 12, and let's begin reading there with verse 10. In fact, we could probably begin reading with verse 8. Matthew 12 verse 8, "For the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath." This shows again that it was a Sabbath day, and it shows that they could not contain Christ.

"And when He was departed, thence He went into their synagogue. And, behold, there was a man which had his hand withered. And they asked Him, saying, Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath days, that they might accuse Him? And He said unto them, What man shall there be among you that shall have one sheep? If it fall into the pit on the Sabbath day, will he not lay hold of it and lift it out? How much then is man better than a sheep? Wherefore it is lawful to do well on the Sabbath days." They did not want Christ to even heal on the Sabbath days. Our Lord is saying, you are a hypocrite. If your sheep falls into a pit, you are going to lift it out, even if it is on the Sabbath day. He is teaching that it is lawful to do good; it is lawful to save life.

In Mark chapter 3, we read, "And he entered again into the synagogue, and there was a man there who had a withered hand. And they watched him, whether he would heal him on the Sabbath day, that they might accuse him. And he said unto the man who had the withered hand, Stand forth. And he said unto them, Is it lawful to do good on the Sabbath days, or to do evil, to save life, or to kill?"

"But they held their peace." These were people who were supposed to know the law of God. "And when he looked round about on them with anger, being grieved for the hardness of their hearts, he said unto the man, Stretch forth thine hand. And he stretched it out, and his hand was restored whole as the other. And the Pharisees went forth and straightway took counsel with the Herodians against Him, how they might destroy Him."

Why? Because He disagreed with their interpretation of the Sabbath. In Luke chapter 13, we see genuine hypocrisy: "And behold, there was a woman which had a spirit of infirmity eighteen years, and was bowed together, and could in no wise lift up herself," so she was bent over and could not straighten out. "And when Jesus saw her, he called her to him, and said unto her, Woman, thou art loose from thine infirmity."

In Luke 13, we read, “And he laid his hands on her, and immediately she was made straight and glorified God.” The ruler of the synagogue answered with indignation because Jesus had healed on the Sabbath day. He said to the people, “There are six days in which men ought to work, and in them therefore come and be healed, but not on the Sabbath day.” The Lord answered him, “Thou hypocrite, doth not each one of you on the Sabbath loose his ox or his ass from the stall, and lead him away to watering? And ought not this woman, being a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan hath bound, lo these eighteen years, be loose from the bond on this Sabbath day?”

When he said these things, all his adversaries were ashamed, and all the people rejoiced in the glorious things done by him. Can you imagine somebody saying that the woman should not have been healed on the Sabbath day? The Lord said, “You’re a hypocrite. You’ll take your ox and water him on the Sabbath day.”

In John 7, our Lord said, “Moses therefore gave you circumcision, not because it was Moses, but of the fathers. And you on the Sabbath day circumcised a man. If a man on the Sabbath day received circumcision, that the law of Moses should not be broken, are ye angry at me because I have made a man every whit whole on the Sabbath day?”

Our Lord was not contained by the Pharisees. They could not fit Him, or make Him fit, into their belief system and traditionalism. Had our Lord bent and bowed to the Pharisees and fit into their belief system, He would have been their star, their friend, and their representative, well known and praised by them. But because He went contrary to what they believed, and contrary to their interpretations and traditions, they went to destroy Him.

Unhappily, I know preachers and many Christians who say, if you do not agree with them, "You're out of here." There are plenty of people who think, like the Pharisees, that they have all truth and that everyone must bow to exactly what they believe and teach. Many cannot abide disagreement with their views. That is very obviously a characteristic of the Pharisees. The first reason they were angry with Christ is that they could not contain Him. They could not make Him their little pupil and their little star.

The second thing is this: They could not confound Him. If they could not contain our Lord—that is, bring Him into the confines of their teaching and traditions—then they were going to confound Him and expose Him as a charlatan and a fraud. Their plan was to trap Him and expose Him. The only problem with their plan was this: It was impossible to confound the Son of God, and He always confounded them.

Reason 2: They Could Not Confound Him

Let me give you some illustrations of this. Look at Luke chapter 20, beginning with verse 1: "And it came to pass that on one of those days," everybody has one of those days, you know. "So it came to pass on one of those days, as he taught the people in the temple and preached the gospel, the chief priests and the scribes came upon him with the elders and spake unto him saying, Tell us by what authority doest thou these things or who is he that gave thee this authority? And he answered and said unto them, I will also ask you one thing and answer me."

"The baptism of John, was it from heaven or of men? And they reasoned within themselves, saying, If we shall say from heaven, he will say, Why then believe you not him? But if we say of men, all the people will stone us, for they be persuaded that John was a prophet.

And they answered that they could not tell whence he was. And Jesus said to them, Neither tell I you by what authority I do these things."

They tried to trap Him, and He, in turn, trapped them. Look again in Luke 20, at verse 20: "And they watched Him and sent forth spies which should feign themselves just men, that they might take hold of His words, that so they might deliver Him into the power and authority of the governor," but they wanted to destroy Him.

"And they asked him, saying, Master, we know that thou sayest and teachest rightly, neither acceptest thou the person of any, but teachest the way of God truly. Is it lawful for us to give tribute unto Caesar or no? But he perceived their craftiness and said unto them, Why tempt ye me? Show me a penny. Whose image and superscription hath it? They answered and said, Caesar's. He said unto them, Render therefore unto Caesar the things which be Caesar's, and unto God the things which be God's."

"And they could not take hold of his words before the people," and they marveled at his answer and held their peace. The Pharisees believed that they alone were the authoritative interpreters of the law. By appealing to our Lord's authority to interpret the law, the questioners tried to accomplish two goals. First, they wanted to force Jesus Christ to answer the question. If He refused to answer, He lost credibility as a rabbi or teacher before the very people who had just been proclaiming Him a king. Secondly, they were forcing Christ to answer based upon the law of God. In other words, they were testing His scriptural knowledge. Owen Ball, who was an author, said this: "The gospel writers thus describe a scene in which Jesus' questioners have boxed him in. He is tempted to assume the authority of a rabbi while at the same time he is constrained to answer according to the dictates of the Torah."

If Jesus said it was lawful to pay tribute, He would have been seen as a collaborator with the Roman occupiers and would alienate the people. The people were there. If our Lord said yes, He would be viewed as a collaborator with the hated Roman Empire. If He said, no, do not pay tribute to Caesar, then He became a political criminal because He incurred the wrath of Rome.

In either answer, someone would have killed Him. If He had answered, yes, pay the taxes, some of the people would probably have risen up against Him. If He said no, the Romans would put Him to death because He was teaching what they would call sedition and treason against the Roman Empire. So what did Christ do? He simply asked for a coin. He could have made His point without the coin, but He asked for one.

He said in verse 24, "Show me a penny." The word "penny" is actually the word denarius. Why did He ask His interrogators for a coin? Because the denarius was truly the emperor's property. It bore his seal, the imperial seal, and differed from the Roman coins that the Senate had issued. They issued a copper coin. The coin He asked for was what we would call the imperial coin. It had the image of Tiberius on it. In fact, Tiberius had even made it against the law to carry his coin into a bathroom or a brothel. This coin was a tangible representation of the emperor's power, wealth, deification, and subjugation.

The denarii that Tiberius had minted were actually made in modern-day Lyons, or Gaul. Spencer Kennard, in his now out-of-print book Rendered to God, says that the denarius circulation in Judea was likely scarce. The only people to transact routinely with the denarius in Judea would have been soldiers, Roman officials, and Jewish leaders in collaboration with Rome.

Thus, it was noteworthy that Jesus Himself did not possess such a coin. The questioners' quickness to produce the coin at Jesus' request implies that they routinely used it, taking advantage of the Roman financial largess. Wherefore, Jesus did not. Moreover, this episode takes place in the temple. By producing the coin, the questioners reveal their religious hypocrisy because they are bringing a profane item into the temple. Our Lord asks, "Whose image and whose superscription is on it?" Whose image? Whose superscription?

These two questions relate to the very first two commandments: "Thou shalt have no other gods before me," and "Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image." On Tiberius' coin were these words: "Tiberius, Caesar, Divi, August, Fili, Augustus." Translated, it means, "Tiberius Caesar, worshipful son of the god Augustus." On

the other side of the coin was the Roman goddess of peace, Pax. Around her were the words “Pontifus Maximus,” which means High Priest. So Tiberius Caesar was not only claiming to be the son of God; he was also claiming to be the High Priest.

There was a Roman cult of emperor worship, and all who used this coin agreed that Tiberius, or the Caesar then, was God. When our Lord said, “Whose image and whose superscription is on it?” as they produced the coin, they were evidencing that they were the hypocrites. They had the coin and brought that profane item into the temple. They were the ones violating the law of God. That is why Scripture says in verse 26, “And they could not take hold of His words before the people, and they marveled at His answers, and they held their peace.” He had confounded them and proved that they were the hypocrites and the violators of God’s law.

SCRIPTURE READING - Luke 20:27-36 (KJV)

> Luke 20, verse 27. "Then came to him a certain of the Sadducees, which denied that there is a resurrection. And they asked him, saying, Master, Moses wrote unto us, If any man's brother die having a wife and he die without children, that his brother should take his wife and raise up seed unto his brother. There were therefore seven brethren. The first took a wife and died without children. The second took her to wife and he died childless. The third took her in the like manner, the seven also, and they left no children and died. Last of all, the woman died also. Therefore in the resurrection whose wife of them is she, for seven had her to wife. And Jesus answering said unto them, The children of this world marry and are given in marriage, but they which shall be accounted worthy to obtain that world and the resurrection from the dead neither marry nor are given in marriage, neither can they die anymore, for they are equal to the angels, and they are

The children of God are the children of the resurrection. Now that the dead are raised, even Moses himself showed at the bush, when he called the Lord the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. For He is not the God of the dead, but of the living, for all live unto Him.

Now, watch this. Here come the Sadducees, who did not even believe in a resurrection. They said there was no resurrection. But they went to the Levite marriage law and said, “The law says, if a man marry a wife and has no children, his brother is to marry her.” That was back when the land was divided, when families kept the land in their families. So they had what they thought was an impossible solution to the problem of the resurrection. They did not believe in the resurrection, and they were trying to prove there could not be one, because seven men had one woman to wife. Now whose wife would she be in the resurrection?

To their consternation and embarrassment, our Lord answered very bluntly in Matthew 22 and verse 29: “Jesus answered them and said, You do err, not knowing the Scriptures, nor the power of God.” The Sadducees, who were in control of the temple and were the priestly order, erred because they did not know the Scriptures, which indeed teach a bodily resurrection. They also did not know the power of God, that God is able to raise up the dead. They did not know that in heaven there is no marriage, nor giving in marriage. Marriage is an earthly phenomenon, not an heavenly phenomenon.

Our Lord once again confounded even the leaders. Matthew 22:46 says, “And no man was able to answer Him a word, neither durst any man from that day forth ask Him any more questions.” He confounded them. They could not trap Him, contain Him, or control Him. I suppose this truth caused them the most consternation and anger. They could not stop Christ. They could not thwart Him, hinder Him, or control Him.

Reason 3: They Could Not Control Him

Thus they were at their wits' end. You know what the Pharisees exclaimed in John 12:19? "Perceive ye how ye prevail nothing. Behold the whole world is going after Him." If they did not do something, they were going to lose their place, their name, and everything, because Christ was taking over.

They could not stop Jesus Christ from healing on the Sabbath, feeding the multitudes, healing the sick, raising the dead, or proclaiming the truth. They could not stop Him from going contrary to their traditions and interpretations. They had no control over

Him. He is the uncontrollable God. God does only as He pleases and always as He pleases. God is not anyone's little servant boy. He does not come at our beck and call, and He does not obey our commands. He did not obey the desires, whims, wishes, or wills of the Pharisees. Rather, He demanded that they repent, throw down their weapons of warfare, cease their rebellion against Him, and bow to Him through the Lord Jesus Christ.

John chapter 5 shows one of the greatest passages on the sovereignty and uncontrollability of Jesus Christ. "After this there was a feast of the Jews, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. Now there is at Jerusalem by the sheep market a pool, which is called in the Hebrew tongue Bethesda, having five porches."

"In these," that is, in these five porches, "lay a great multitude of impotent folk, of blind, halt, withered, waiting for the moving of the water. For an angel went down at a certain season into the pool and troubled the water. Whosoever then first after the troubling of the water stepped in was made whole of whatsoever disease he had. And a certain man was there which had an infirmity thirty and eight years."

"And Jesus saw him lie and knew that he had been now a long time in that case. And he said to him, Wilt thou be made whole? The impotent man answered him, Sir, I have no man when the water is troubled to put me into the pool. But while I am coming, another steppeth down before me. Jesus said unto him, Rise, take up thy bed, and walk. And immediately the man was made whole, and took up his bed, and walked."

"And on the same day was the Sabbath. The Jews therefore said unto him that was cured, It is the Sabbath day. It is not lawful for thee to carry thy bed." Lord have mercy. "He answered them, He that made me whole, the same said unto me, Take up thy bed and walk. Then asked they him, What man is that which said unto thee, Take up thy bed and walk?"

"And he that was healed wist not that it was Jesus, for Jesus had conveyed himself away, a multitude being in that place. Afterwards, Jesus findeth him in the temple and said unto him, Behold, thou art made whole. Sin no more, lest a worse thing come upon thee. The

man departed and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had made him whole. And therefore did the Jews persecute Jesus and sought to slay him, because he had done these things on the Sabbath day. But Jesus answered them, Watch, my father worketh hitherto, and I work. Therefore, the Jews sought the more to kill him, because he not only had broken the Sabbath, but said also that God was his Father, making himself equal with God."

How many people were sick, blind, halt, and withered, laying in these five porches? The Scripture says, "a great multitude." How many did our Lord heal? One. Did that man know who Christ was? No. Did he ask for healing? No. Christ went to him and singled him out. Christ asked him, "Wilt thou be made whole?" The man still did not know who Christ was. While he was trying to get to the pool, someone stepped in ahead of him. Then our Lord simply said, "Rise, take up thy bed, and walk."

How many of these people needed healing? All of them. Could Christ have healed every one of them? Yes, but He did not. Why would Christ go through a whole multitude of sick, halt, blind, and lame people, pick one out, heal him, and leave the rest? Here is the answer. Our Lord said, "My Father worketh hitherto, and I work."

The Bible said they sought to kill Him even more, not only because He had violated their interpretation of the Sabbath, but because He had made Himself equal with God. In John 5:21, our Lord says, "For as the Father raiseth up the dead and quickeneth them," watch, "even so the Son quickeneth whom He will." What is the one attribute that proves beyond a shadow of a doubt that God is God?

And the answer is, He's sovereign. He's uncontrollable. He's answerable to no one. He does as He pleases, only as He pleases, always as He pleases. He's God. John 5:21 says, “For as the Father raises up the dead and quickeneth them, even so the Son quickeneth whom He will. For the Father judgeth no man, but has committed all judgment to the Son. That all men should honor the Son even as equal to the honor they give to the Father. He that honoreth not the Son honoreth not the Father which sent him.”

Why did Jesus do that? To prove one thing: He's God, sovereign, and Lord. He quickeneth whom He will. He does as He pleases. He is the uncontrollable God. When men discover they cannot control God or make Him do as they please, they get very upset and angry. God is not answerable or accountable to any man, group of men, anybody, or anything, because He's God. Any and everything is answerable and accountable to Him. He's not accountable to us.

In fact, Scripture says He gives no account of any matters to us. He doesn't have to. Why did God take my spouse? Because God is God. Why did God take my child? Because God is God. Why did God save you? Because God is God. Why does God bless you? Because God is God. Why does God withhold His blessing? Because God is God.

We have to learn what the Pharisees refused to learn and hated: God is in control, not us, not man. His kingdom shall stand, not man's kingdom. The sooner you and I learn that God is in control, the better off we are going to be. They hated Him because they couldn't contain Him, confound Him, or control Him.

Applications: Anger at God's Uncontrollable Sovereignty

Men are often filled with madness at Christ because He does not work the way or when they desire. He does not answer their cries or prayers as they desire. Their anger is based upon the fact that God is beyond their control. If God submitted to them and did what they wanted, they would not be angry with Him; they would love that kind of God. But David said in Psalm 115:3, “But our God is in the heavens, he hath done whatsoever he hath pleased.”

Have you ever stopped to think how foolish it is to be angry with the only one who could possibly ever help you? You talk about cutting off your nose to spite your face. Why in the world would you get angry with God when He is the only one who can possibly ever help us?

The second application is this: many who are themselves guilty of the greatest crimes are quick to censure others for the most innocent and inoffensive actions. Look at Christ and His disciples. They just

walked through the wheat field, got a little grain, removed the husk, and ate it. The Pharisees asked, “Why is it that you and your disciples do that which is unlawful to do on the Sabbath?” That was according to their interpretation. Yet it was their practice to feed themselves deliciously, especially on the Sabbath days. All you have to do is read Isaiah 58, where God condemns their doing their own pleasure on His days. They were hypocrites.

Our Lord rightly asks in Matthew 20 and verse 15, “Is it not lawful for me to do with what I will with mine own?” “Is thine eye evil because I am good?”

You remember how Judas came back and threw the thirty pieces of silver down on the floor. The Pharisees and Sadducees said, “It is not lawful to put this into the treasury for its blood money.” It was lawful to take it out of the treasury to condemn an innocent man, but once He was condemned, it was not lawful to put it back in the treasury. What?

The truth of the matter is this: it is God’s law that counts. Man always perverts, misinterprets, and misapplies anything and everything from the Word of God. We need to know the Scripture and the Word of God so that we will not be swayed by the interpretations and traditions of man.

Thirdly, men are often enraged because others do well in a way they do not approve. Did you know God is going to do what He wants to do, whether you approve of it or not? Whether you like it or not, whether you agree with it or not, God is going to do what He wants to do and what He wills to do, what He is pleased to do. The truth of the matter is this: I personally would rather be in submission to Him—to what He wills, wants, and desires—and be blessed by Him than get angry with Him because I cannot control Him or make Him do what I want Him to do.

So many people want to change God. You are going to find it impossible to change the unchangeable God, and impossible to control the uncontrollable God. For He is sovereign. Do you realize the reason the Pharisees, the Sadducees, and the Herodians hated Christ and were so angry with Him was that they could not contain Him, confound Him, or control Him?

These are exactly why the world is so upset with Him today. Politicians hate Him, and governments despise Him, because He demands that they repent and submit to Him. He is King of kings and Lord of lords and God of gods. Psalm 2 says, “Kiss the Son, lest He be angry with thee, and you perish in the way when His wrath is kindled but a little.” It addresses the kings of the earth. He is the uncontrollable God.

Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we thank You for Your love. We thank You: You are the sovereign God of heaven and earth. We know that Thou art on the throne of the universe, ruling according to Your own will. We acknowledge, Heavenly Father, that whatever Thou doest is right and holy, for Thou art God. Give us grace to submit to Thee, bow before Thee, trust Thee, love Thee, and bring our lives into conformity to Your Word. Help us, we pray. In the name of Jesus Christ, we ask it. Amen.

CHAPTER 10

The Biblical and Historical Significance of the Beard

Introduction and Disclaimers

The biblical and historical significance of the beard is a subject concerning which there is a wealth of material in the Bible. In Leviticus 19:26–28, God tells His people, “You shall not eat any thing with the blood, neither shall ye use enchantment, nor observe times. Ye shall not round the corners of your heads, neither shalt thou mar the corners of thy beard. Ye shall not make any cuttings in your flesh for the dead, nor print any marks upon you: I am the LORD.” This command was given in reference to all of God’s people in general.

Leviticus 21 gives instruction concerning the priests, the sons of Aaron: “There shall none be defiled for the dead among his people, but for his kin that is near unto him, that is, for his mother, and for his father, and for his son, and for his daughter, and for his brother, And for his sister a virgin, that is nigh unto him, which hath no husband; for her may he be defiled. But he shall not defile himself, being a chief man among his people, to profane himself. They shall

not make baldness upon their head, neither shall they shave off the corner of their beard, nor make any cuttings in their flesh. They shall be holy unto their God, and not profane the name of their God: for the offerings of the LORD made by fire, and the bread of their God, they do offer: therefore they shall be holy."

Many years ago, I preached this message on the biblical and historical significance of the beard. It has essentially gone around the world, and I have received comments concerning it from Italy, South Africa, England, and Wales. It is one of the most listened-to messages on SermonAudio and one of the most downloaded. Since I preached it many years ago, it has been copied, plagiarized in some instances, and vilified. I have even seen it with another pastor's name attached to it. I really do not mind, particularly in the case I am thinking of, because he added only one or two little things.

What This Message Is Not

I showed Alice the message on the internet and was amused to see that another preacher had even used an illustration I had used. Since he did not know me, he said, "There is in Pastor John Weaver's office." I certainly do not mind the message being preached, repreached, or reclaimed by anyone. I am like Paul; I rejoice that at least the Word of God is being preached and getting out.

A number of preachers and other people have asked me to redo this message. Let me begin by telling you what I am not going to do. First, I am not defending my beard. It does not need defending, and the fact that I have had it for over forty years demonstrates that I genuinely believe what I am going to share with you. None of my grandchildren has ever seen me without a beard, and probably my children do not even remember me without one unless they occasionally glance at a picture. So I am not defending the beard.

Secondly, I am not trying to bind my convictions upon your conscience. I pray that the Word of God will be opened to you, that you may see the truth of what I am preaching. But it is your responsibility to study Scripture for yourself and search out the matter. The Bible tells you in Proverbs 25:2, "It is the glory of God to conceal a thing, but it is the honor of kings to search out a matter." It

is your responsibility to search out this matter according to the Word of God.

Thirdly—and listen carefully—I am not saying that a man without a beard is less holy than one who has a beard. Moreover, I am not saying that a man with a beard is more holy than a man without one. But I am going to show you shortly from Scripture what a beard does indeed represent and why I believe that, especially for a godly man, there should be a visible beard.

Fourthly, I am not asking you, the men particularly, to grow a beard for my benefit. I would never encourage anyone to do anything they do not understand to be based upon the pure Word of God. I am not the Lord of your conscience. Jesus Christ is the Lord of your conscience, so you are to be bound by His Word and not my word. But I would ask you to submit to the Word of God and to be easily entreated, as James says, to the engrafted Word of God. I believe it will give you a great deal of understanding upon this subject, and you will find out that, in reality, a beard is not only a very important matter, it is a biblical matter according to Scripture.

Now let me tell you what I am going to ask you to do at the very beginning. I am going to ask you to do that which our Lord commands in John 7:24: "Judge not according to appearance, but judge righteous judgment." Unhappily, today most people judge by appearance. They do not judge by righteous judgment or just judgment.

If you want to go by appearance, I could take you down to our local post office, through the FBI's most wanted list, or show you the pictures they have there of the men they want. Probably 90 percent of the wanted men on the FBI list are clean-shaven. I could then conclude that anyone who is clean-shaven is a criminal and is probably wanted by the FBI. You would say that was an erroneous judgment, and it would be. But I would be judging by appearance.

Our Lord says that we are not to judge by appearance. We are to judge just and righteous judgment. Another objection arises because, in times past, individuals lived the hippie lifestyle and wore beards; oftentimes they were dirty, unkempt, and certainly rebellious. But just because someone abuses or misuses a truth does

not mean that we disobey or disregard the truth. We do not cease observing the Lord's table because the Roman Catholics have turned it into a perpetual mass. We do not cease baptizing people because some teach baptismal regeneration. We do not discard marital sex because there are adulterers and fornicators. You do not throw the baby out with the bathwater.

Just because someone abuses and misuses a truth does not mean that the truth is wrong. It just means that they are wrong for abusing and misusing the truth. In fact, the truth of the matter is there is a growing trend, and it has been over the past years, especially among young people, to go for what is known as the Kung Fu or the Kojak look, which in our day and time is now referred to as the unisex look. In fact, if you will go into some of the larger department stores and start to go to a bathroom, you will usually see gentlemen and ladies and then unisex.

I can point you to several down in Florida, and they are there. Or sometimes they will say, "A family bathroom." A family bathroom? I get tickled because, you know, I go into these bathrooms and it says, "Baby changing station." I have stayed there all day and tried to get somebody to change babies with me, and nobody will take mine. I know what it means, but I get tickled every time I see that: "Baby changing station." Who wants to change babies?

But anyhow, I am simply saying, here is what you and I understand. Since this unisex look is going around, men are looking like women, and women are looking like men. Certainly, we are going to condemn that because it is condemned in the Word of God. There is indeed a biblical significance to a beard and to a man looking like a man.

Second, I want you to understand that a man who has a full beard is not prohibited by the Word of God. In fact, the beard is commended in the Word of God, and there are definite regulations laid down in the Scripture concerning the beard.

You see, the biggest taboo—and it was not so much today as it was back in the 1970s, when I first preached this message—was a bearded pastor. In other words, back then, pastors simply did not have beards. Everybody was basically clean-shaven, is what it

amounted to. In fact, even the university that I originally attended back in the 1960s did not allow beards. I have known Christian men who were not accepted in other churches because they had a beard. I have known Christian men who were turned down for teaching positions because they had a beard. So the taboo that I am pointing out is not God's taboo, but it is man's taboo.

They have never considered what the Word of God teaches. Thirdly, I would like to encourage you to think biblically today. We claim to be Christians, and we claim to love the Word of God, yet for all practical purposes, most professing Christians neglect the Word of God. We neglect to study these subjects. I guarantee you I could probably count on one hand the number of preachers, and especially the number of Christians, who have ever looked in the Bible to see what the Bible has to say about a beard. Very few.

In fact, I will tell you how I came to preach this message. One of my pastor friends, whom I have known for years, had a beautiful head full of gray hair and a beautiful gray beard. I looked at him and said, "Why did you grow a beard?" His response was, "Because of what the Bible teaches about the beard." I asked, "Well, what does the Bible teach about the beard?" He looked at me and said, "I'm not going to tell you. If you want to know, go home and study it out for yourself."

That is exactly what I did, and that is why I came to preach this message years ago. But listen to what the Bible says in 2 Corinthians 10, verses 4 and 5. The apostle Paul said, "For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds; casting down imaginations and every high thing that exalted itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ."

If we think about a beard, government, education, money, family—whatever we think—we are responsible to bring every thought captive to Jesus Christ. We are responsible to think biblically. Most people have never thought upon this subject at all.

I have heard this said in times past: someone would offer an objection and say, "Well, I just don't know if it's right or wrong for a man to have a beard." My response is this: let's stop right there. That

is not really for you and me to decide, because God has already determined that. He has created men so that they may have beards. The question, in reality, is not whether it is right or wrong to have a beard, but whether it is right or wrong to shave. And you cannot shave it off; it keeps growing back.

You have to keep shaving over and over and over. One person said this to me years ago, and it was a woman. She said, “Your beard is offensive to me.” If someone tries to say that beards are offensive, my first response is this: anyone who finds a beard offensive needs to take that up with God, because God gave beards to men.

Secondly, to offend someone biblically means to encourage them to do what you are doing without having your knowledge. The Greek word is skandalon for offend. You find it in Romans 14 and 1 Corinthians 8; it is where we get our English word scandal. The only woman who ever said that to me, I said to her as I smiled, “Dear lady, my beard could not possibly offend you, because you could not do what I am doing even if you had my knowledge.” When I brought that brief series on Romans 14 on how to avoid conflicts between Christians, I pointed out that when someone says, “Well, your beard offends me,” what they really mean is, “You need to shave it off; I do not like it.” That is what they really mean.

Anyone who has a problem with a beard, or with any other biblical subject, not only has a problem with God, but also with the law of God. How can I say that? The Bible says in Psalm 119:165, “Great peace have they that love thy law, and nothing shall offend them.” If you are offended, obviously you do not love the law of God. Clearly, then, there is a problem between someone, God, and His Word.

Men have beards, and that is the way God has created us. You must ask yourself: Why did God give men beards? Why do men have beards? You must also ask: What does a beard signify?

A beard, really and truly, is a public and a private testimony. It is a public testimony when it is grown, neatly trimmed, and groomed, because everyone who sees it will many times ask concerning it. It is also a private testimony: when the man who has it looks into the mirror, he remembers why God gave him that beard, what it means, and what his life should be. There are five things to consider.

The History of Beards

First, consider the history of beards. Before examining the biblical passages, history may be studied and analyzed simply by looking at the rise and fall of the beard. Historical truth is important. It is not equal to biblical truth, yet all history is God's history, for God is the God of history. History reveals either the lack and ignorance of, or the knowledge and importance of, biblical truth upon civilization. You can look at civilization and see that when the Word of God is supreme, certain things transpire. When the Word of God is not supreme—when rationalism and man's thoughts are supreme—certain things transpire as well.

An interesting tidbit of history is that Egypt was about the only country in antiquity that forbade a man to have a beard or to let his beard grow out. The Egyptians disliked facial hair. They shaved themselves and forced their slaves to shave. Any biblical scholar will tell you quickly that Egypt is a type of the world. In the Bible, Egypt has always represented contrariness to God, to His law, and to His people. Egypt, then, by and large, was a nation of beardless men.

When you look at the sculptures and ancient art, even a picture, of Pharaoh, you will see that Pharaoh always had a sharp, pointed goatee. But if you look very carefully at the picture or sculpture, you will see a very thin line going up his cheeks and over his ears. The beard was a fake beard; it was simply tied on.

There was a reason for that. Even women sometimes in Egypt had these fake beards. For instance, Queen Hatshepsut dressed like a man and is shown with a fake beard. In Egypt, the fake beard was used either for celebrations or public appearances. There was also a religious significance attached to it. The beard in Egypt was considered a divine attribute of the gods; thus, when Pharaoh, the Queen, or some other public person donned a fake beard, they were identifying themselves as a living god. The Pharaoh had that fake beard tied on so he could identify himself with deity.

Another interesting thing is that, if you study the history of Egypt, you will find that the enemies of Egypt are always depicted with beards. Maybe that is another reason the Egyptians found facial hair disgusting: they identified it with an enemy of Egypt. In Greek and

Roman mythology, the false gods are usually presented as beardless. There were some presented with beards, that is true, but in their paintings and sculpturing, the false gods were usually beardless.

The Council of Carthage, which was a church council in the early 200 AD, discussed problems in the church. One of those problems was immodest dress. We might think, How in the world could they have problems with immodest dress in 200 AD? Today we look around and see the miniskirts, the shortened halters, and the tank tops, and we say, “Yes, we have problems with immodest dress.” Well, they had problems with immodest dress in 200 AD. But let me tell you what the Council of Carthage said was immodest dress. Listen carefully. Here is the quote from the council concerning immodest dress.

"Any man who appears in church with long hair and a clean-shaven face will be excluded from communion, for that man is immodestly dressed." A man with long hair and a clean-shaven face was considered immodestly dressed and was to be excluded from communion.

Tertullian, one of the early church fathers, wrote his treatise on the beard and said that its purpose was to keep lust down. Some women say, "Well, he looks better without a beard." He may, but Tertullian said that one of the reasons for the beard was to keep lust down. The Fourth Council of Carthage in 398 said, "The clergyman shall not let his hair grow, neither shall he remove his beard."

Many of the ancients believed and taught that God gave man a beard to distinguish him from a woman, and therefore it was wrong to antagonize nature by shaving. Clement of Alexandria probably wrote more against shaving than any other Christian writer combined. Calling the beard "man's natural adornment," Clement said, "it is never permissible to remove it." He went on to say, "The hairs of the beard have been numbered." Clement warned his readers, "To seek beauty in hairlessness is sheer effeminacy, if done by men."

He continued, "God planned that the woman be smooth skin, taking pride in her natural tresses, the only hair she has, as the horse in its mane. But man, he adorned like the lion with a beard." Women

were like horses with the long, flowing mane; men were like lions with the beard. He went on to say, "This then is the mark of the man, the beard. By this he is seen to be a man. It is older than Eve. It is the token of superior nature. It is therefore unholy to desecrate the symbol of manhood, hairiness."

When the barbarian hordes invaded the Roman Empire, they had long hair and clean-shaven faces. It was at this time, when Rome fell, that Christendom as a whole became what you and I would call Romanized. The barbarians then began to infiltrate the church, and their pagan rites and rituals were incorporated into it. Since the barbarians had long hair and clean-shaven faces, that is what began to happen. The men had long hair and clean-shaven faces. It is interesting that, if you look at the early pictures of Christ, and even pictures today, Christ is always pictured with long hair and a beard.

Have you ever wondered about that? Let me tell you dogmatically, in no uncertain terms: our Lord did not have long hair. How can I say that? First, remember that when our Lord was alive, Caesar was on the throne. The style was known as the Caesar cut or the Caesar style. It was short hair on the top of the head and never even touched the ears. That was the style during our Lord's lifetime. Moreover, the Bible specifically says in 1 Corinthians 11:14, "Doth not even nature itself teach you ... that, if a man have long hair, it is a shame unto him?"

The Greek word for shame is atimia, which literally refers to that which is vile, shameful, dishonorable, ignominious, disgraceful, and a reproach. If it was a reproach, shameful, and vile for a man to have long hair, remember that Jesus Christ was and still is the sinless Son of God. He would never have done anything that was vile and reproachful. Moreover, the Bible tells us in Isaiah 42:21 concerning Christ, "The Lord is well pleased for his righteousness sake; he will magnify the law, and make it honourable."

Therefore, the law says it is unnatural and a shame for a man to have long hair. I can assure you Christ never had long hair.

Christ is also presented in these pictures and works of art as having a beard, because you could not deny that. It was very plainly and clearly said, not only in Scripture, but in truth and history as

well. I want to point out a glaring inconsistency. Have you ever considered the inconsistency of people who literally worship the Lord Jesus Christ, who had a beard, and then turn around and try to say it is wrong for a man to have a beard?

It was during the sixteenth century that one of the great awakenings occurred, known as the Reformation. Bloody Mary, Queen of England, was on the throne from 1516 to 1558. In 1517, Martin Luther nailed his ninety-five theses to the castle church door in Wittenberg, Germany, and began to teach and preach that the just shall live by faith. If you go back and look at some of these men as they began in the Reformation, you will notice short hair and beards. On the other hand, during the Renaissance, when man's rationalism prevailed, men had long hair and clean-shaven faces. The same was true in France during the Enlightenment, when so many were agnostics, atheists, infidels, and deists. They had long hair and clean-shaven faces. During the War of Northern Aggression, when you look at the pictures of godly men, you always find that they have beards.

Stonewall Jackson, Robert E. Lee, Jeb Stuart, James Longstreet, and Richard Stoddard Ewell—all of these men. If you look at old pictures of the Confederate veterans, ninety percent of them have beards. Beards were worn from that period until you get to World War I, when German liberalism began to infiltrate society. Then beards began to disappear, and once again long hair and clean-shaven faces came out.

You can study civilization with the rise and fall of the beard. A few men down through the ages cried out against clean-shaven faces. In 1528, William Tyndale was one of them. He pointed out that shaving is borrowed of the heathen and proclaimed that the shaven nation have put Christ out of his room. William Shakespeare even said in Much Ado About Nothing, “He that hath a beard is more than a youth, and he that hath no beard is less than a man. He that hath a beard is more than a youth, and he that hath no beard is less than a man.”

In 1859, an Englishman named James Ward wrote The Defense of the Beard, a pamphlet listing eighteen reasons why men were bound to grow a beard unless a man was indifferent as to offending the

Creator and good taste. The next year, a work was published titled Shaving, a Breach of the Sabbath and a Hindrance to the Spread of the Gospel. In this book, the author described the beard as a divinely provided chest protector.

So they had long beards coming down here. One sentence from that book reads: “Beard shaving and the common use of the razor, an unnatural, irrational, unmanly, ungodly, and fatal fashion among Christians.” One of the more humorous quotes I found concerning the beard came from Tom Robbins: “Of the seven dwarves, only Dopey had a clean-shaven face, and that should tell us something about the custom of shaving.” The bearded races of mankind have commonly held the beard in high honor.

It is a sign of full manhood, and the very young male or eunuch was beardless, while the bearded woman was considered a witch. Whenever you see pictures of Adam or God or the prophets, kings, and nobles, they are always presented with beards. Thus the Semites, those descended from Shem, or the Hebrews and Israelites, have always held the beard in great esteem. Listen to this quote directly: “Among them, that is among the Hebrews, the Israelites, among them it is more injurious for anyone to have his beard cut off than among us to be publicly whipped or branded with a hot iron.”

Many men in that country would prefer death to such a punishment. The wives kiss their husband's beards and the children their father's when they come to salute them. The men kiss one another's beards reciprocally when they salute in the streets or come from a journey. They say that the beard is the perfection of the human face, which would be more disfigured by having this cut off than by losing the nose. They admire any and envy those who have fine beards. “Pray do but see,” they cry, “that beard,” and the very sight of it would persuade anyone that he to whom it belongs is an honest man.

If anyone with a fine beard is guilty of an unbecoming action, they would say, “What a disadvantage is this to such a beard? How much such a beard should be pitted?” If they would correct anyone's mistakes, they will tell him, “For shame on your beard. Does not the confusion that follows such an action light upon your beard?” If they entreat anyone or use oaths affirming or denying anything, they

would say, “I conjure you by your beard,” or “by the life of your beard to grant me this,” or “by your beard this is or is not so.” They say further, in the way of acknowledgement, “May God preserve your blessed beard,” or “May God pour out His blessings upon your beard.” In comparison, they say, “This is more valuable than anyone's beards,” or “anyone's beard.”

Now, if you understand these sayings, you're going to begin to understand a lot of Scripture. For instance, do you remember—and you don't turn there, please—the dishonor that David did to his own beard when he was escaping from King Saul and fled to Achish, king of Gath? He was the Philistine, by the way. When David understood that some of the men were saying, “Well, is not this David? Did not he kill all of our men?” listen to what David did. First Samuel 21:13 says, “And he, David, changed his behavior before them, and feigned himself mad in their hands, and scrabbled on the doors of the gate, and let a spittle fall down upon his beard.” He was clawing at the door, foaming at the mouth, we would say, and letting all the spittle run down upon his beard. What happened? Achish said, First Samuel 21:14–15, “Then said Achish unto his servants, ‘You see the man is mad.”

“Wherefore then have you brought him to me? Have I need of mad men that you have brought this fellow to play the mad man in my presence? Shall this fellow come into my house?” So David’s actions of scrabbling and clawing at the door and letting the spittle fall down upon his beard persuaded Achish that he was crazy, that he was out of his mind. Achish understood that no man in his right mind would ever defile his beard.

When David was driven off the throne by Absalom, he had taken Mephibosheth, Saul’s grandson, into his home. Mephibosheth, you remember, was laying upon his feet. Ziba, his servant, lied to him, escaped to carry some things to David, and said, “Mephibosheth said, ‘Well, the kingdom of my father is going to be returned to me this day.’” But when David came back after the destruction of Absalom and his army, in 2 Samuel 19 verse 24, we read: “And Mephibosheth the son of Saul came down to meet the king, and had neither dressed his feet, nor trimmed his beard, nor washed his clothes from the day the king departed until the day he came in

peace." Mephibosheth was in mourning concerning the travesty that had been done to David, and the proof that Ziba had lied was that Mephibosheth had not dressed his feet, trimmed his beard, or washed his clothes. The beard was always a cherished and sacred thing.

Israel brought the beard safely out of the bondage of universally shaven Egypt, and the beard was always the outward and visible sign of a true man. To rudely touch the beard was to cruelly assail a man's dignity. Children and other kinfolks might gently touch it as a sign of love. A fugitive might reverentially raise his hand to it while praying for succor or help. He who put his own hand upon his own beard and swore by it bound himself by the most solemn of oaths; to violate it would render him infamous among his fellow men. To touch the beard in allegiance of love established peace and trustfulness between two parties.

When Joab went to Amasa, he took him by the beard to kiss him and said, "Art thou in health, my brother?" It was a pretended act of love and friendship, but Joab had an ulterior motive. In 2 Samuel 20 verses 9 and 10: "And Joab said to Amasa, 'Art thou in health, my brother?' And Joab took Amasa by the beard with his right hand to kiss him. But Amasa took no heed to the sword that was in Joab's hand."

"So he smote him there under the fifth rib, and shed out his bowels to the ground, and struck him not again, and so he died." What did Joab do? Joab was following a customary greeting, a sign of trust and friendship, respect and devotion. He took Amasa's beard and was going to kiss it, asking, "Art thou in health, my brother?" Amasa was so concerned with the compliment, in all probability preparing to return it by kissing Joab's beard, that he took no notice of the sword in Joab's hand. Joab then literally murdered him and shed out his blood. It was during this act of kindness, respect, and honor that Amasa did not suspect either the deadly blow or Joab's treasonous attitude toward him.

In Luke 22:28, Judas had already told the people, "Him whom I kiss, hold fast." When Judas came to betray Christ, Christ said, "Judas, betrayest thou the Son of Man with a kiss." Judas would have gone up to take our Lord's beard and kiss it. Undoubtedly,

Judas had learned this method from Joab, who was a traitor and a deceiver.

The Beard as an Assumed Fact in Scripture

Secondly, the beard is an assumed fact and reality in Scripture. An assumed fact is something taken for granted, a presuppositional truth, like the doctrine of God. The Bible never tries to prove the existence of God; it simply assumes it: “In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.” Likewise, there is no definite command in the Bible for men to grow a beard. However, it is assumed that a man will have a beard because that is the way God created him, and his facial hair will grow.

Moreover, there are divine regulations concerning the beard in the Bible. The Hebrew word for beard is zakhan, and the Hebrew word for elder is achin. Thus the elders in Israel received their names from their beards; the word actually means “a bearded one.” We have seen the history of the beard and the fact that it is assumed. Let me give you, thirdly, the value of the beard.

The Hebrews always looked upon the beard as the glory and pride of man. They would say that the glory of the face is the beard. It was a badge of honor, dignity, and manhood. Anyone wishing to express the value of an object would say, "It is worth more than a man's beard." When a woman wanted to express the value of something, she would say, "It's more valuable than my husband's beard." Men often took oaths by their beards; they swore by them.

The Value of the Beard

Every one of us knows the story of the three little pigs and the big bad wolf. What did he say? "I'm going to huff and puff and blow your house down." And what did the little pig say? "Not by the hair of my chinny chin chin." What was he doing? He was taking an oath on the hair of his chin. Now, I realize pigs don't have beards, but that was a fairy tale; that's where it came from. Historically and biblically, men took oaths based upon their beards. Even Shakespeare, in his plays, has men swearing and taking oaths by their beards.

Proverbs 20:29 says, "The glory of young men is their strength, and the beauty of old men is their gray head." The ornament of young men is their strength, and the honor of old men is the gray hairs—and here it is in the Hebrew, the hanging gray from the chin. It was not necessarily talking about the gray hair up here. Some of us aren't able to have gray hair up here. It does refer to the hanging gray from the chin.

Whenever you see a man with a beard, you ought to consider several things. First, to pull it is to inflict an indignity. I've really only had my beard pulled one time that I can remember, and anger flew over me instantaneously. Not that I wanted to be angry, but the individual did not realize what he was doing. I very quickly said, "No, you never ever pull a man's beard. It's an indignity. It's an insult."

Secondly, to have it forcibly cut off or mutilated is a symbol of disgrace, which I will show you from the Bible momentarily. Thirdly, to remove the beard voluntarily is a sign of mourning, which they did occasionally in the Bible. To stroke the beard like this is a preface to uttering seemingly very important words, or words of weight and value. And to kiss the beard is a sign of great respect, honor, friendship, and brotherly love.

You cannot understand a number of verses in the New Testament if you do not understand this simple fact. For instance, in 1 Corinthians 16:20, the apostle Paul said, “All the brethren greet you,” and then, “greet you one another with a holy kiss.” In Romans 16:16, Paul again said, “Salute one another with a holy kiss. The churches of Christ salute you.” First Thessalonians 5:26 says, “Greet all the brethren with a holy kiss.” Then 1 Peter 5:14 says, “Greet you one another with a kiss of charity. Peace be with you, all that are in Christ Jesus. Amen.”

How do you greet the brethren with a holy kiss? Because it was customary, not only in the Old Testament but in the New Testament, when brethren met, out of great respect and affection, to take each other’s beard and kiss the beard. I have had men kiss my beard. One man did it particularly every time he saw me. He understood this passage, and I was not offended by it. In fact, I thought, at least he understands the Scripture.

You cannot understand the value of the beard unless you understand these Scriptures. That is how men normally greeted each other in the Old Testament and the New Testament, by kissing each other's beards. Let me show you how valuable a beard was.

In 2 Samuel chapter 10, beginning with verse 1, we read: "And it came to pass after this, that the king of the children of Ammon died, and Hanun his son reigned in his stead. Then said David, 'I will show kindness unto Hanun the son of Nahash, as his father showed kindness unto me.' And David sent to comfort him by the hand of his servants for his father. And David's servants came into the land of the children of Ammon. And the princes of the children of Ammon said unto Hanun their lord, 'Thinkest thou that David doth honor thy father, that he hath sent comforters unto thee? Hath not David rather sent his servants unto thee to search the city, and to spy it out, and to overthrow it?' Wherefore Hanun took David's servants, and shaved off one half of their beards, and cut off their garments in the middle, even their buttocks, and sent them away."

And when they told it unto David, he sent to meet them, because the men were greatly ashamed. And the king said, "Tarry ye at Jericho, until your beards be grown, and then return." When the children of Ammon saw that they stank before David, they sent and hired the Syrians of Beth Rehoboam, the Syrians of Zobah, twenty thousand footmen, of King Maacah, one thousand men, and of Ishtab, twelve thousand men. When David heard of it, he sent Joab and all the hosts of the mighty men. The children of Ammon came out and put the battle in array. David wiped out the Ammonites and the Syrians.

Hanun took David's diplomats, his servants, shaved off half their beards, cut off their garments, and exposed their buttocks. The Ammonites knew exactly what they were doing when they mutilated the Hebrews' beards. They knew it was a deadly insult. When the diplomats sent word to David that their beards had been mutilated, their garments cut off, and their buttocks exposed, David said to them, "Tarry ye at Jericho until your beards be grown." That was the insult. It did not concern them, to put it bluntly, that their fannies had been exposed.

What embarrassed and humiliated them was that their beards had been mutilated and defiled. It was an insult. You can buy more clothes, but you cannot grow a beard overnight. David then destroyed the Ammonites and the Syrians; here was a whole war fought over beards.

Moreover, in 1764, a pretender to the Persian throne named Cherub Khan sent ambassadors to Mir Mahanan, the Prince of Bengaravik on the Persian Gulf, to demand tribute from him. In return, he cut off the ambassadors' beards. Karim Khan was so enraged that the next year he went with a large army, assaulted and took the city and almost the entire territory, to avenge the insult. To touch the beard was therefore an insult unless it was done as an act of friendship and a token of respect.

Beards have been so valued through the years that it would be interesting to look not only at pictures of the Bible prophets, but also at preachers through the years. Most old preachers, up until the turn of this century, had beards. Charles Haddon Spurgeon not only had a very beautiful beard, but demanded that all his deacons have beards. You could not be a deacon in Spurgeon's Tabernacle unless you had a beard. I have a picture in my library of Spurgeon and all his deacons, and every one of them is well bearded.

Now, the meaning of the beard: Why did God give men beards? What does a beard signify? First of all, the beard represents and signifies life unto God. Only living men can grow a beard. In the Bible, it was the leper who had to be shaven. Leprosy is not only representative of sin and death, but is also a symbol of the judgment of God.

The Meaning of the Beard

Do you remember how God smote Miriam with leprosy when she rebelled against Moses? Do you remember how God gave Gehazi, the servant of Elisha, the leprosy that Naaman had because of his sin and deceit?

Now listen to the law of the leper. This is Leviticus 13:29–30 and verse 33. God says, “If a man or a woman have a plague upon the head or the beard, then the priest shall see the plague, and behold, if

it be in sight deeper than the skin, and there being it a yellow thin hair, then the priest shall pronounce him unclean, it is a dry skull, even a leprosy, upon the head of the beard. And he shall be shaven, and the skull shall he not shave, but the priest shall shut him up that hath the skull seven days more."

If a man had leprosy, he had to be clean-shaven. Leprosy is a sign of sin and death and the judgment of God. When you come to the healing of a leper in Leviticus 14, once again, when he came and presented everything that God demanded, he had to be clean-shaven. Only when the priest pronounced him clean was he allowed to grow his beard.

So, first and foremost, the beard is a symbol of life unto God. It signifies life: we are free from sin, free from death, and free from the judgment of God.

Secondly, a beard signifies submission unto God. A beardless man, or one with a clean-shaven face, indicated that he was a slave or in submission to man. To be deprived of a beard was, and still is in many places, a badge of civility, a mark of infamy that degraded a man from the ranks of men to those of slaves and women.

Joseph wore his beard while he was in prison. He was a slave, sold into slavery, yet while he was in prison he wore his beard. When Pharaoh called him to stand before him, Joseph shaved his beard. Why? Because he was a slave, and it would have been an insult and dishonor to Pharaoh for him to stand there with his beard.

Genesis 41:14 says, "Then Pharaoh sent and called Joseph. And they brought him hastily out of the dungeon, and he shaved himself and changed his raiment, and he came unto Pharaoh." Why did he do that? Because to be beardless signified that you were in submission to man, that you were a slave. Since Joseph was a slave, he took the mark of a slave and shaved himself. In Genesis 41:40, Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Thou shalt be over my house according to thy word. Shall all my people be ruled? Only in the throne will I be greater than thou." He was saying, "You are subject to me. You are my servant. Everybody else is going to be your servant, but you are my servant."

Biblically speaking, then, the beard indicates that men are in submission to God. I am not saying that Joseph was out of the will of God when he shaved his beard, because God certainly put him there. However, in the context of what happened, when a man shaves his beard, it indicates that he is in a position of servitude or submission to man. I am not implying that merely because a man has a beard, he is in subjection to God. Unhappily, that is not true. Multitudes of men across this world who have beards are in rebellion against God and the Lord Jesus Christ, and they are lost in their sins. But the beard, in reality, signifies submission unto God. Men who have beards but are not in submission to God are betraying the symbol of what the beard represents.

It is like long hair on a woman, which symbolizes that she is in submission to her husband. I know plenty of women who have long hair but are not in submission to their husbands. The long hair does them no good at all; their lives betray the symbol.

Thirdly, a beard indicates separation unto God. In Bible times, when a man looked at another man's beard, he knew whom that man worshipped and who was his God. A beard basically told you who your God was. Pagans usually marred their beards as well as their heads. When God says, "I shall not mar the corner of your beard," this is the corner of the beard.

To mar the corner, then, would be to have what we would call the goatee. The pagans did that because they did it in honor of the sun, the moon, the stars, and the heavenly bodies. Herodotus, one of the early historians, said this of the Arabs: “Where a custom shaved the hair round the head and left a tuft to stand up on the crown in honor of Bacchus.”

In Leviticus 19, verses 26 through 28, God says, “You shall not eat anything with the blood, neither shall you use enchantment nor observe times. You shall not round the corners of your head, neither shall thou mar the corners of thy beard.” Why? In Leviticus 21, verses 5 through 6, the priest was not to make any baldness upon his head, neither were they to shave the corners of their beards. Why? Because the Hebrews had full beards, and that full beard represented separation to God.

When you saw the man with just the goatee and the mustache, it meant, in historical and Bible times, that he was a worshipper of Bacchus, or Baal, or Ortal, or one of the heavenly bodies. It is important for us to understand that the beard, in Scripture, represents life, freedom, and separation of God. But the symbol is nothing without reality. When God's people act like the wicked, God will punish them exactly like the wicked. God indicates that He will cut or mar the corners of their beard.

In Jeremiah 9, Jeremiah 25, and Jeremiah 49, when God talks about those who are in the utmost corners, He is not talking about places or geographical locations. He is talking about the beard. God says, "Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will punish all them that are circumcised with the uncircumcision, Egypt and Judah and Edom and the children of Ammon and Moab and all that are in the utmost corners that dwell in the wilderness. For all these nations are uncircumcised, and all the house of Israel are uncircumcised in the heart." They were circumcised physically and were in the covenant, but they were acting like the heathen. God says, You want to act like the heathen? Fine, I'll judge you like the heathen. You find the same thing in Jeremiah 25:23 and Jeremiah 49:32: "I will mar the corners."

The Beard as a Sign of Blessing and Judgment

Fourthly, the beard signifies the blessings of God upon His people. Psalm 133, beginning with verse 1, says, "Behold how good and pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity. It is like the precious ointment upon the head that ran down upon the beard, even Aaron's beard that went down to the skirts of his garments. As the dew of Hermon, and as the dew that descended upon the mountains of Zion, for there the Lord commanded the blessing, even life evermore."

When Aaron and his sons were anointed with that oil, it poured on their heads, ran down their beards, even to their garments. Thus, a well-groomed and well-cared-for beard indicates the blessings of God upon that individual and his dedication to the service of God.

The Beard and Divine Judgment

The beard was plucked off, plucked out, shaved off, or left unattended only during a time of great mourning and calamity. We have already pointed this out in Mephibosheth. When Job lost everything he had and his ten children, Job 1:20 says, "Then Job arose and rent his mantle and shaved his head and fell down upon the ground in worship." In Ezra 9:3, when Ezra saw the sin of all the people, he said, "And when I heard this thing, I rent my garment and my mantle, and plucked off the hair of my head and of my beard, and sat down astonished."

Now, in light of this, listen carefully if you really want to understand what happened to our Lord Jesus Christ. When God was going to bring judgment upon His people because they refused to repent and return to Him, He indicated that great judgment by telling them that He was going to shave their beards.

When I first grew my beard, about forty years ago, I would have nightmares. I would wake up clean-shaven and not know how I had become clean-shaven. I would wake up with chills because I did not know what had happened. Why would that affect me, or why should it affect anyone? Because when God is going to bring judgment upon His disobedient people, He is going to do it under the symbol of shaving their beards.

Isaiah 7:20 says, "In the same day shall the Lord shave with the razor that is hired, namely by them beyond the river, that is the Assyrians, by the king of Assyria the head and the hair of the feet, and it shall also consume the beard." What did God say to those people? "I'm going to shave you bald." Why? Because the beard represents life unto God. It represents submission to God, separation to God, the blessings of God, and dedication to God. But these people refused to repent and surrender to God. God said, "You want to live like the heathen? Fine, I will judge you like the heathen."

He said in Isaiah 15:2, "He is going up to Bajeth and to Dibbon, high places to weep. Moab shall howl over Nebo and over Medeba. All their heads shall be baldness and every beard shall be cut off." In Jeremiah 48:37, God said, "For every head shall be bald and every

beard shall be clipped. Upon all the hands shall be cuttings and upon the loins sackcloth." God said, "I'll shave you bald."

In Ezekiel 5:1, to represent what God was going to do, He told Ezekiel, "And thou, son of man, take thee a sharp knife, take thee a barber's razor, and cause it to pass upon thine head, and upon thy beard, then take thee balances to weigh and divide the hair." Just as Ezekiel had shaved his beard, God would shave the nation. When God sets forth the severity of His judgment upon His people because of their sin and rebellion, He does so under the picture and emblem of taking away the beard. The greatest indignity that could be inflicted upon a man is to have his beard plucked out.

It was a sheer and a sure sign of the judgment of God upon him. If you wanted to know what happened to our Lord Jesus Christ, you need to understand this. In Isaiah 50 and verse 6, concerning our Lord, He said, "I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheeks to those that plucked off the hair. I hid not my face from shame and spitting."

Our Lord gave His cheeks to those who plucked off the hair. They reached up, took handfuls of the beard, and jerked it out. It was excruciatingly painful, but they did not do it merely to increase the pain. They jerked the beard out because it was the custom then to symbolize, saying, You are under the curse of God; you are judged by God; you are under the wrath of God; God's shaving you. Was that not true concerning our Lord, who was our substitute? Did He not bear our wrath and take our punishment? His beard was plucked out to show that He stood as our surety and substitute and suffered the judgment of God in our stead.

God gave beards to men. The question is not whether it is right or wrong to have a beard; the question is whether it is right or wrong to shave. The beard is the distinguishing mark of a man. A bearded man can never be mistaken for a woman. Beards were regarded as sacred ornaments given by God to men to distinguish them from women.

The Purpose of the Beard

In Deuteronomy 22 and verse 5, we read, "The woman shall not wear that which pertaineth to the man, neither shall a man put on a woman's garment, for all that do so are an abomination to the Lord." Keil and Delitzsch said: "The immediate design of this prohibition was not to prevent licentiousness or to oppose idolaters practices but to maintain the sanctity of that distinction of the sexes which was established by the creation of man and woman and in relation to which Israel was not to sin. Every violation or wiping out of this distinction was unnatural and therefore an abomination in the sight of God." Their commentary says that this verse is directed against any and all who would obliterate or blur the distinctions between the sexes, and idolatry was often associated with the unisex or transgenderism.

In Acts chapter 19, Paul got into trouble with the people because they worshipped Diana of the Ephesians and kept shouting, “Great is Diana of the Ephesians.” Diana was a statue of a woman with multiple breasts. Why would they put multiple breasts on a statue of a woman? Because that is the distinguishing mark of a woman. But when you look at Diana, she not only has multiple breasts; she also has a beard, because that is the distinguishing mark of a man.

Those who worshipped her often dressed contrary to their sex to offer sacrifices: the men dressed like women, and the women dressed like men. Many of the pagans did the same thing. In Greece, Rome, and ancient Egypt, there was a deliberate attempt to break down the distinction between the sexes. Thus, the ancients believed that the beardless man was a feminine man. When the pagans made their statue of Diana, they gave her a beard. Ellicott in his commentary says, “To destroy the divinely instituted distinction between the sexes leads to licentiousness, immorality, and confusion. Whatever leads to render the male sex effeminate or the female sex masculine is an injury to both.”

One thing for sure: a short-haired man might be mistaken for a woman if he had very tender looks, but a short-haired man with a beard could never, ever be taken for a woman.

Herodotus, whom I mentioned earlier, one of the early historians, said that when the barbarians invaded the Roman Empire, since they had long hair and clean-shaven faces, “They had been smitten by a deity and turned into a woman.” Isn’t that amazing?

The first application is this: We cannot deny, disparage, or denigrate any part of the Word of God. All Scripture is inspired of God and is given for our instruction and edification. If there was no importance concerning the beard, why would God not only give regulations concerning it, but use it as a symbol to express His divine judgment? Very obviously, there is something to the beard.

Applications and Conclusion

Secondly, there has been, lately, a resurgence of the beard in recent days, for which I am thankful. I think that is an indication that men as a whole are growing weary with the effeminacy of our modern-day society. There is another implication: men are indeed growing weary of servitude, serfdom, and slavery. Once again, remember that the beard indicated freedom from those things. When men wear beards, they are saying, in essence, “I’m willing and I want to be in submission to God, separated to Him, and blessed by Him.”

Thirdly, the beard is to picture our life unto God: our submission to God, our separation to God, and the blessings of God upon us. But the symbol is nothing without the life. The beard is to be a public and a private testimony. I have had innumerable people over the years ask me why I have a beard, and I take the opportunity to explain and answer.

Each time I look in the mirror, see the beard, and trim it, I have to think: This beard tells me I am to be in submission to the one true and living God. The question is, am I? I am to be separated unto Him; am I? I am to have His blessings upon me; do I? The beard is important, historically and biblically, and there is a reason why God gave men beards. We need to understand that and be able to apply it.

Father, we ask in the name of Jesus Christ for Your help, grace, mercy, and truth. We pray, Lord, that You would teach us, build us up in the most holy faith, and give us grace that we may serve You

acceptably with reverence and godly fear. In Thy name we pray. Amen.

CHAPTER 11

The Present Truth

Introduction and Text

Peter instructs us in a very vital and important principle: the present truth. In 2 Peter 1:12-15 he says, “Wherefore, I will not be negligent to put you always in remembrance of these things, though ye know them, and be established in the present truth. Yea, I think it meet, as long as I am in this tabernacle, to stir you up by putting you in remembrance; knowing that shortly I must put off this my tabernacle, even as our Lord Jesus Christ hath shewed me. Moreover I will endeavour that ye may be able after my decease to have these things always in remembrance.”

Peter says, “I will not be negligent to put you always in remembrance of these things, though ye know them and be established in the present truth.” This vital principle is the present truth, and Peter calls our attention to it again: he will not neglect his duty by failing to repeat this truth to them.

The Necessity of Repeated Truth

First, truth needs to be heard over and over. It is only as we hear the truth repeatedly that we become grounded, settled, and established in it. Rehearsing truth forces us continually to analyze and reinforce that truth in our lives. It enables us to examine ourselves according to 2 Corinthians 13:5: “Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?” Here is the opportunity to know yourself and to prove yourself. So first, we are told that this truth needs to be heard over and over.

Secondly, repetition aids learning. It was not burdensome or onerous for Peter to teach his hearers that which they already knew. He was well aware that they were well instructed in the truth. They knew the truth, yet they needed to hear the truth again. The fact that they already knew the truth did not deter him from faithfully preaching and reproclaiming the same truth again. The more we hear the truth, the more we understand the truth. One reason we are so forgetful and neglectful of truth is that we do not hear it repeated often enough. Repetition aids learning.

Thirdly, Peter undoubtedly learned this method of instruction from the Master Teacher, the Lord Jesus Christ.

In Mark 10:1 we read, “And he,” that is Christ, “arose from thence, and cometh into the coasts of Judaea by the farther side of Jordan. And the people resort unto him again; and, as he was wont, he taught them again.” Note that the people resorted to Him again. In other words, it was the same people. And as He was accustomed to, He taught them again. He may have been communicating some of the same truths that He had preached and taught them earlier. In all probability, He did so because of the word “again.”

Therefore, we must hear truth repeatedly. Hebrews 2:1 says, “Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip.” Notice the past tense: we have heard them. They are in the past, but we must give more earnest heed to these things, lest at any time we should let them slip. It is easy for truth to slip away from us if we do not constantly re-hear it and have it re-preached to us.

Being Established in the Present Truth

Now look at verse 12, because that is basically the message today: “Wherefore I will not be negligent to put you always in remembrance of these things, though ye know them, and be established in the present truth.” The things he is talking about primarily are the truths from verses 1 through 11. He goes on to say in verse 13 that, as long as he is alive, he wants to stir them up by putting them in remembrance. In verse 14, he knows that shortly he must die and put off his tabernacle. Then, in verse 15, he says, “I will endeavour that ye may be able after my decease to have these things always in remembrance.” Therefore, he is re-teaching and re-preaching these truths before he dies.

In verse 12, he says, “I want you to be established in the present truth.” The Greek word for “established” is stērizō. It literally means to be steadfast, fixed, constant, confirmed, and established in one’s mind. Now, listen carefully. We are going to look at a number of Scriptures.

It is God's will that you be established in truth, and established in the present truth, which I am going to teach you just a little bit later. The Bible says in Colossians 2, verse 7, "Rooted and built up in him, and established in the faith, as ye have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving." So very clearly, it is indeed the will of God that you be established in truth.

There are various and multitudinous benefits to being established in the truth. Psalm 112 says, "Praise ye the Lord. Blessed is the man that feareth the Lord, that delighteth greatly in his commandments. His seed shall be mighty upon the earth. The generation of the upright shall be blessed. Wealth and riches shall be in his house, and his righteousness endureth forever. Unto the upright there riseth light in the darkness."

This is the man who is established: "He is gracious and full of compassion and righteous. A good man showeth favor and lendeth. He will guide his affairs with discretion. Surely he shall not be moved forever. The righteous shall be in everlasting remembrance. He shall not be afraid of evil tidings. His heart is fixed, trusting in the Lord. His heart is established and he shall not be afraid, until he

see his desire upon his enemies. He hath dispersed, he hath given to the poor, his righteousness endureth forever, his horn shall be exalted with honor."

The wicked shall see it and be grieved; he shall gnash with his teeth and melt away, and the desire of the wicked shall perish. Notice this man who is established in the truth. His seed is going to be mighty. Wealth and riches are going to be his. Light is going to rise unto him. He is not going to be moved. He is not going to be afraid of evil tidings. His heart is fixed. He is established. There are a multitude of benefits and blessings in being established in the faith. We certainly need to concentrate on being established in the faith. The opposite of being established in the faith is being double-minded.

The Bible says in James 1:5–8, “If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, who giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not, and it shall be given him. But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed. For let not that man think that he shall receive anything of the Lord. A double-minded man is unstable in all of his ways.” If you are not established in the faith, obviously you are going to be a double-minded man.

Defining 'Present Truth'

So in 2 Peter 1:12, Peter wants his hearers to be established. Moreover, he wants them to be established in the present truth. What is the present truth? The Greek word for “present” here is pareimi. It literally means to be at hand, to be by, or to be present. The present truth literally means that truth which is right in front of you.

The word “present” is used this way in Scripture. Luke 13:1 says, “There were present at that season some that told him of the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices.” There were some present who told Him. What does it mean that they were present? They were standing right in front of Him. Therefore, present truth is that truth which is right in front of you.

If you are present in front of someone, talking to someone, you are there, and that is what the word "present" means—that which is right in front of you. In 2 Corinthians 10:11, the Apostle Paul writes, "Let such an one think this, that such as we are in word by letters when we are absent, such will we be also in deed when we are present." Paul says that when he is standing right in front of them, he will be exactly the same as when he is absent and writing to them. Thus, "present" means that which is right in front of you.

When you look back at 2 Peter 1:12, you have to understand that Peter understood his hearers were well fixed, established, and constant in the present truth. They had not only heard the truth; they understood the truth and applied the truth.

We are now talking about the present truth. First of all, I do not mean that truth is relative or that it changes with situations, conditions, circumstances, or the progress or erosion of society. God's law does not change. His definition of sin has not changed. Man cannot change that which is unlawful, sinful, wicked, and rebellious into that which is lawful and just, no matter which century he lives in. What was sin in the first century is still sin in the twenty-first century. What was good, righteous, and holy in the first century is still good, righteous, and holy in the twenty-first century.

When I talk about the present truth, I am definitely not speaking about situation ethics. I am not saying that truth changes with the situation. God's Word is constant and fixed. That is why the Bible says in Psalm 119:89, "Forever, O Lord, is thy word settled in the heavens." Our Lord said in John 17:17, "Sanctify them through thy truth. Thy word is truth." Therefore, the term "the present truth" does not mean that truth is relative or changes.

Neither am I saying that there is such a thing as new truth. The phrase "the present truth" does not imply new truth. If a revelation is new, it is not true, for there is no such thing as new truth.

We must remember that Jesus Christ is the full and final revelation of God. Hebrews 1:1 says, "God, who at sundry times and in divers manners," that is, at different times in different ways, "spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets."

It is true that in the Old Testament and sometimes in the New Testament, God used visions and dreams. But the Bible says, "But hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds; who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high."

The Bible tells us that God in times past spoke in different ways to the prophets. But He said that God hath in these last days spoken to us by His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. For someone, therefore, to believe in new truth, he has to deny that Jesus Christ is the full and final revelation and truth. There is no new truth. Once you begin saying, "I've got a new truth," you are denying the completeness of God's Word and denying the person of Jesus Christ.

There is no need for visions, dreams, horoscopes, astrological forecasters, false prophets, faith in spurious religious writings, or anything that is over, above, and beyond the Word of God and the Lord Jesus Christ. It is absolute blasphemy to ascribe anything or anyone above the full, final, and complete revelation of God in Jesus Christ and in His Word. When someone comes along and says there is a new truth, it is a denial of Christ and a denial of Scripture.

When I speak about the present truth, I am not talking about situation ethics. I am not saying that truth is relative, nor am I saying there is such a thing as a new truth. What, then, do I mean by the present truth? You have to understand that when God gave us the Bible, He simply did not dump truth on us all at one time.

Progressive Revelation in Scripture

The Bible was written over a period of 1,600 years by 40 different authors. Even while the Bible was being written, there was a progressive unfolding of the truth. Isaiah 28, verses 9 and 10, says: “Whom shall he teach knowledge? And whom shall he make to understand doctrine? Them that are weaned from the milk and drawn from the breast. For precept must be upon precept, precept upon precept, line upon line, line upon line, here a little and there a little.”

What did God do when He gave us the Bible? He gave us line upon line, precept upon precept, here a little and there a little. I want to show you what I mean by progressive revelation, or the progressive unfolding of the truth. If we take no one else other than the Lord Jesus Christ, this should explain it. If you were to go to Genesis chapter 3, verse 15, that is the protevangelium.

That is the first promise of the Messiah in the Bible. It is there that God says that the seed of the woman is going to crush the serpent's head, and the serpent will bruise his heel. So the very first thing you find out about the Messiah in Genesis chapter 3, verse 15, is He is going to be born of a woman and He is going to be victorious.

It was only in Genesis chapter 12, verses 1 through 3, particularly, that we discover that the Messiah is going to come from the seed of Abraham. We were not told that in Genesis 3, verse 15. It was only later in Genesis 49, verse 10, that we find out that the Messiah is going to be born, not just simply of the seed of Abraham, but of the tribe of Judah. Then, many years later, it was revealed in 2 Samuel chapter 7, verses 12-13, that the Messiah was going to be the seed of David.

It was a multitude of years later in Isaiah 7:14 when we discover that the Messiah is going to be born of a virgin. It was still a multitude of years later in Micah 5, verse 2, where we found out that the Messiah is going to be born in Bethlehem of Judea. So, from Genesis 3:15 all the way to Micah 5:2, there is a progressive unfolding of the truth. God did not reveal everything about Messiah at one time. God did not reveal all of His truth at one time. Each stage of this revelation, this progressive unfolding of truth, would be classified as a present truth.

Another illustration is found in Acts chapter 18, beginning with verse 24: "And a certain Jew named Apollos, born at Alexandria, an eloquent man and mighty in the scriptures, came to Ephesus. This man was instructed in the way of the Lord. And being fervent in spirit, he spake and taught diligently the things of the Lord, knowing only the baptism of John."

So his knowledge was limited. Verse 26 says, "And he began to speak boldly in the synagogue: whom when Aquila and Priscilla had

heard, they took him unto them, and expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly. And when he was disposed to pass into Achaia, the brethren wrote, exhorting the disciples to receive him: who, when he was come, helped them much which had believed through grace."

"For he mightily convinced the Jews, and that publicly, showing by the scriptures that Jesus was Christ." Here was a mighty preacher, an eloquent man, but all he knew was the baptism of John. He had not heard anything since then. When Aquila and Priscilla heard him, they said, "You need to visit with us. There's a lot that has been transpiring and that has transpired since you heard about the baptism of John.

"Let me tell you about the present truth. Let me tell you what has really happened concerning the Messiah, how he was crucified, buried, resurrected, and is seated at the right hand of the Father." So they instructed him more fully in the truth that had been revealed at that time.

Look in Acts chapter 19, beginning with verse 1: "And it came to pass that while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul, having passed through the upper coasts, came to Ephesus. And finding certain disciples, he said unto them, Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed? And they said unto him, We have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost. And he said unto them, Unto what then were ye baptized? And they said, Unto John's baptism. Then said Paul, John verily baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying unto the people that they should believe on him which should come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus. And when they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus."

What did Paul do? He filled them in on the present truth, on that which had been revealed at that particular time and which they had not heard. There was a progressive unfolding of the truth.

Remember Acts chapter 10 and Cornelius, the Roman centurion who sent for Peter. God gave Peter a vision of a sheet descending from heaven with all kind of beasts on it and told him to rise and eat. Peter said, "Not so, Lord, for I've never eaten anything common or

unclean." Our Lord answered, "That which God has cleansed, that call not thou common or unclean."

The vision was repeated three times. When Peter saw it, he went down, and immediately three men were knocking at the door: "Come with us." The Holy Spirit told him to go. When he arrived at Cornelius's house, he said, "You know that it is unlawful for a man to come into and to eat with those who are considered unclean or a Gentile or Greek or Roman."

Revelation Ceased, Illumination Continues

But he said, "God has showed me something." He went in and preached, and the household of Cornelius was converted. So you see, there was a progressive unfolding of the truth. When he told everyone in Jerusalem what had happened, they said in verse 18, "Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life." There was a progressive unfolding of the truth while the Bible was being written.

Now that the Bible is complete, there is no more progressive revelation. In fact, there is no more revelation, period. Revelation has ceased. God is not and will not reveal anything above and beyond His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. Revelation has ended. However, that does not mean there is no such thing as present truth. If revelation has ended, how can there be present truth? The answer is simple: there is a progressive illumination of the truth.

God did not give His Word all at one time, and He does not give us understanding all at one time. Revelation is the act of God whereby He reveals truth never known before to the human mind. A good illustration is Genesis chapters 1 through 3. Moses wrote those chapters, but how did he know what happened in creation? He was not there and had not even been born. The answer is that God revealed it to him. That is revelation. Therefore, revelation has ceased; God is not revealing anything over and above the Lord Jesus Christ or His Word.

If somebody is looking for visions, dreams, and trances, they are in trouble. They might get something like that, but it is not coming from God. Illumination is the act or ministry of the Holy Spirit of

God whereby He enlightens our mind that we might understand previously revealed truth. Just as God did not reveal the truth all at one time, He does not enable us to understand the truth all at one time. Just as there was a progressive unfolding of truth in revelation, there is a progressive illumination and understanding of the truth. You must also remember that the God who is sovereign in salvation is equally sovereign in illumination. He determines what I understand and when I understand it. No man understands all truth, and no man understands it all at one time.

In Mark 4:33–34, the Bible says, “And with many such parables spake he the word unto them, as they were able to hear it.” God teaches you as you are able to hear it. “But without a parable spake he not unto them. And when they were alone, he expounded all things to his disciples.” If you really want to understand Scripture, you have to get alone with Jesus Christ, because He is the author of His Word and can expound and explain that Word. Notice that He only spoke the Word to them as they were able to hear it.

In John 16:12, our Lord says to His disciples, “I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now.” “Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth. For he shall not speak of himself, but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak, and he will show you things to come. He shall glorify me, for he shall receive of mine and shall show it unto you.”

Our Lord said that when the Holy Spirit is come, whom He is going to send, He will guide us into all truth. In other words, it is the ministry of the Holy Spirit to enlighten our minds, to illuminate our minds, to guide us, and enable us to understand the Scripture.

If you understand the doctrine of illumination, and understand that God is sovereign in illumination, it will teach you to be patient with each other. I could look at Ed and explain something to him right down the line. I could give him chapter and verse and be just as clear as the sun on a bright and shiny day. But if God does not open his mind, he is not going to understand it. What good would it do me to become angry and say, “What’s wrong with you? Are you just stupid? Are you dumb? What’s wrong with you, Ed?” Why would I get angry with him if he cannot see truth? I understand that only God can open our minds and enable us to see truth.

If we understand that God must teach us and illuminate our minds, we can be patient with each other. We can say, “Ed, you do not see it right now. I will pray for you. Do you want me to explain it to you again tomorrow? I will do it. Do you want me to explain it three times the next day? I will do it, until God opens your eyes.”

It is true that Ed has a responsibility to study, because the Bible says in 2 Timothy 2:7, “Study to shew thyself approved unto God.” Paul told Timothy, “Consider what I say; and the Lord give thee understanding in all things.” The point is that God is not going to give you understanding without studying. But unless you study and seek understanding, if God does not open your eyes, you are not going to understand anything.

So it will teach us to be patient with each other. Here is one of our problems as Christians: we are not accustomed to receiving truth as the present truth. We are comfortable with our salvation and with our limited knowledge and understanding of Scripture. Everyone in this room would say, "Yes, God created this earth and God created the world in six days and rested on the seventh." You have no problem with that. You understand salvation by grace through faith alone. You have no problem with that. In other words, we may be grounded and established in a few points, but we are not necessarily grounded and established in the present truth.

Historical Examples of Present Truth

The way I can prove that is that we do not place much emphasis upon the preached Word of God. We place almost no importance on the amount of study, preparation, and prayer that goes into preparing a message. I have been working on three or four messages that I will bring in the future for weeks—literally for weeks. I have not kept an account of the time I have spent studying and searching the Scripture and developing these messages. You hear me preach, but you have no idea of the study, preparation, or prayer that went into it; consequently, all you want to do is hear the preaching.

If we understood what the Bible means by the present truth, we would receive the preaching and teaching of God's Word eagerly and readily. We would also understand our desperate need for that truth. Consider some illustrations. If you were alive in the first century

during the cult of emperor worship in the Roman Empire, the present truth at that time would be the Lordship of Jesus Christ. You would serve and worship either Christ or Caesar. There is an application of daily life to the present truth: you would have to choose between Christ and Caesar. If you were alive in Germany in the 1500s, the present truth would be justification by faith alone. You would either side with Luther and the Reformers or hold to salvation by works as taught by the Roman Catholic Church. It was the present truth in the 1500s.

If you were alive in France or Geneva, Switzerland, in the 1500s, especially during the middle of that era, the present truth would have been the sovereignty of God. You would either join with Calvin and the Reformers in believing, preaching, and teaching the sovereignty of God, or hold to a humanistic position on the divine right of kings. If you were alive in Scotland during the 1500s, the present truth would be the kingship of Christ. You would either stand with John Knox and the Reformers, or hold to a statist position.

If you were alive in England in the 1700s, the present truth would be the purity of the church. You would either hold with the Puritans who wanted to purify the church, or with those content and satisfied with the wickedness and unbiblical things going on in the church. Moreover, when the church did not purify itself, there came the separatists, who drew out of that local church and wanted a pure worship. They said, "We are going to separate ourselves from this church that will not purify itself." You would either hold with the separatists, or with the established church and its impure worship.

Here we are in 2015. Once again, the present truth involves not only the Lordship of Christ, but the superiority of His Word. You will either serve, worship, and obey Jesus Christ and the Bible, or follow the humanists in sodomy, fornication, adultery, aborticide, socialism, communism, Marxism, and all the other social and governmental sins. In other words, you will either fight for truth, liberty, and freedom, or be swallowed up by the tyrannical and despotic governments that abound today. There is the present truth.

Martin Luther certainly understood the heat of the battle. He wrote: "If I profess with the loudest voice and clearest exposition

every portion of the truth of God, except precisely that little point which the world and the devil are at that moment attacking, I am not confessing Christ. However boldly I may be professing Christ, where the battle rages, there the loyalty of the soldier is proved, and to be steady on all the battlefields besides is mere flight and disgrace if he flinches at that point."

Discerning and Applying Present Truth

Martin Luther said, "I can profess the truth loudly with the clearest expositions in every area except that one area where the battle is raging. And if I do not profess the truth in that area, I have effectively denied Christ and denied the Word of God." This statement of Martin Luther reveals a present truth: the truth has to be professed where the battle is raging.

We need to profess the truth concerning the Confederate battle flag. We need to profess the truth concerning Southern history. We need to profess the truth concerning the Word of God. We need to profess the truth concerning the Lordship of Jesus Christ. We need to profess the truth of the superiority of the Word of God. Where we have to do this is where the battle is raging. Now, here is my question: How do we ascertain what the present truth is?

Let me give you two answers. First, it is a truth from God's Word that is under attack by the humanists, liberals, and unbelievers. All I can say is, look around you. See where the attacks are directed. That is the spot where you need to stand. That is the spot where you need to lift your standard and say, "I'm sorry, you're wrong. The Word of God says this." Just look and see what is being attacked. There is where you need to stand.

The second way I would answer that question—how do we discern present truth?—is this: present truth is that which is being proclaimed by God's men—from God's Word—as necessity is laid upon them in the providence of God. Listen carefully: I am not referring to mama-called-and-papa-sent, ear-tickling preachers, but to real, genuine men of God. Titus 1:1-2 says, "Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ, according to the faith of God's elect and the acknowledging of the truth which is after godliness, in hope

of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began."

To whom did He promise it? To Jesus Christ and those who were in Jesus Christ. But watch: "...but hath in due times manifested his word through preaching, which is committed unto me according to the commandment of God our Saviour." Paul said that Jesus Christ was promised the salvation of His people, and that God promised salvation before the world ever began. How do we know all of it? Because it was now manifested through the preaching of the Word of God. The Bible says in Amos 3, verse 7, "Surely the Lord God will do nothing, but he revealeth his secret unto his servants the prophets."

In other words, whatever God is going to do, in God's providence, He will burden His preachers to warn His people and to direct, encourage, and bless His people with the truth.

Let me give you an illustration. Recently, Alice and I went to a chaplains conference in Virginia. I was the first speaker. After me, there were probably five others who spoke. Before I went up there, I knew what I was going to preach. I preached to those people the message I preach to you: "When God Has Had Enough." Remember, I was preaching to preachers and to many other people who were there, too. Do you realize that the next five speakers, all good and godly men, each brought a message on the judgment of God? There were six different messages on the judgment of God. We had never planned these messages. I never spoke to any of them, they never spoke to me, and we never spoke to one another.

Yet each of us preached almost exactly the same truth. That should leave you scratching your head and asking, "Is God trying to tell me something? Should I be making some preparations?" Of course, this is what I mean: present truth is that which is being expounded and explained from His Word by His preachers.

Let me remind you of this. I am not talking about the opinions of men, or about asking me my opinion or what I think. I am talking about expounding the Word of God. Let me read it to you from Nehemiah 8, verses 7 and 8.

"And the Levites caused the people to understand the law: and the people stood in their place. So they read in the book of the law of

God distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading." So here's what real preaching is: exposition, explanation, and application. When you are expounding, explaining, and applying the Word of God, that is a far cry from your opinion or what you think. You have to understand that the present truth is not the decrees of courts. It is not the ravings of lunatic lawyers, nor is it the acts of a legislative body. No, it is a truth of God's Word laid upon the hearts of His servants to proclaim to God's people for their benefit, blessing, and warning. That's the present truth.

I mentioned this the other day and here before, but it serves to illustrate my point. When I went to boot camp at Fort Jackson, South Carolina, I went into the mess hall for breakfast, and they were serving creamed beef on toast. All the soldiers have a name for that, which I'm not going to repeat. I looked at that stuff. It was so unappetizing. You have to remember, I came off a farm. We had real eggs, grits, biscuits, gravy, potatoes, and meat. Here they wanted to give me some kind of slop like that. I refused to eat it. I said, "I'm not going to eat that stuff," and I didn't.

But what I did not know was that they had planned for us that day a five-mile hike with full field packs. By nine o'clock in the morning, that creamed beef on toast got to looking real appetizing in my mind. I wished I'd eaten that stuff.

Now, the point is this: I didn't get to choose my menu for breakfast at boot camp. Somebody else chose it for me. They decided because they knew what they were going to train us in that particular day. They knew we needed the protein, and so that is what they gave us. Do you realize the same thing is true spiritually? God sets before His people exactly that which they need.

For He knows your tests, your trials, your tribulations, and your tasks for the coming week. If you turn your nose up at what God gives you, you are going to do without. You are going to do like I did—marching down with your stomach growling, hungry as all get out, saying, “I wish I had eaten something. I wish I had eaten something.” You will be saying, “If only I had listened. If only I had listened. If I had only taken that and applied it to my life.”

Jeremiah 3:14 says, “Turn, O backsliding children, saith the Lord, for I am married unto you, and I will take you one of a city and two of a family, and I will bring you to Zion.” But look what God is going to do for those people: “And I will give you pastors according to mine heart, which shall feed you with knowledge and understanding.”

The present truth is that exposition, that explanation, and that application being preached to you weekly from the Word of God. So here is my application: Are you established in the present truth? Do you have any idea what the present truth really is? Are you content with that which you know, or that which you think you know?

You have to understand that when God gives you a message from His Word, He is saying, “This is what I want you to have. This is what you need.” The present truth right now for this message is the present truth. You have to learn to receive God’s Word as the present truth.

It is not the opinions of men. It is an exposition from the Word of God.

Now, let me tie this together with a second application. What is your attitude toward the preached Word of God? I can tell you what the attitude of a lot of people happens to be. A lot of people's attitude is, "Oh." Some have the attitude, "Well, let's hurry up and get this over with. I've got to get on with my life. I've got to get the dinner."

So here is the question: Do you view the preaching of the Word of God as it really is—the Word of God—or do you merely regard it as the word of man?

Let me show you. Look in your Bibles to 1 Thessalonians, chapter 2, verse 13. The Apostle Paul writes to the Thessalonians: "For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe."

These Thessalonians, when they heard Paul preach, did not say, "That's just Paul's idea. That's Paul's opinion." When they heard Silas or Barnabas preach, they did not say, "Well, they're just up there saying things." No. They received it as the Word of God, and not as the word of men.

So the question is, how do you receive the preaching of the Word of God? Do you say, "This is God's will. This is God's Word for my life"? It is the present truth. It is what God would have me to understand right now, what God would have me to apply to my life right now, and what I should be living right now. Or do you think it is just oratory?

If you want the Word of God to work effectually in you, you need to receive it as the Word of God and not as the word of men. So Peter said, "I want you to be established in the present truth." What truth was that? The truth that Peter was preaching at that time.

He said, “You already know some things. Fine, I am going to remind you of them. And I want you to be established, because you need to hear what God says over and over again.”

Let us pray. Father, we thank you in the name of Jesus Christ for your Word and truth. Help us, build us up in the most holy faith, and give us courage to stand and be what we should be for your honor and glory. In Christ’s name we pray. Amen.

CHAPTER 12

Worship as Warfare

Introduction: The Captain of the Lord's Host

Joshua chapter 5. We are reading verses 13 through 15. I will not be preaching on this text, but I am going to use it as an introduction, and we will be looking at a large number of passages today. So keep your Bibles open and your fingers flexible.

Notice Joshua chapter 5, beginning with verse 13: And it came to pass when Joshua was by Jericho, that he lifted up his eyes and looked. And, behold, there stood a man over against him with a sword drawn in his hand. And Joshua went unto him, and said unto him, Art thou for us, or for our adversaries? And he said, Nay; but as captain of the host of the Lord am I now come. And Joshua fell on his face to the earth, and did worship, and said unto him, What saith my Lord unto his servant? And the captain of the Lord's host said unto Joshua, Loose thy shoe from off thy foot; for the place whereon thou standest is holy. And Joshua did so.

This passage, of course, is known as a Christophany, which is a pre-incarnate appearing of Christ in the Old Testament, where Christ appeared before He actually became flesh. He appeared to

Joshua as the head, or the captain, of the host of the Lord. So the message today is that worship is warfare. We have a captain that leads us in holy warfare. He is indeed the mighty conqueror.

Let me ask you a question and I want you to think: Have you ever thought of engaging in warfare as you entered into a church building to worship the one true and living God? Unhappily, most of us do not really understand either worship or warfare, and certainly we do not understand worship as warfare. The Apostle Paul certainly understood this concept. In Ephesians chapter 6, beginning with verse 10, he explains something very plainly. Turn in your Bibles, if you would, to Ephesians chapter 6, and notice verse 11. In fact, let us begin reading at verse 10: Ephesians 6 and verse 10.

The Christian's Warfare and Armor

He tells you, “Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might.” Then he delineates how we are to be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might: “Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. Wherefore, take unto you the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness, and your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace, above all, taking the shield of faith wherewith you shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked, and take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints.”

Note very closely that the Apostle Paul not only tells us to put on the whole armor of God; he then delineates each piece of armor and tells us that each piece is absolutely necessary just to stand in the evil day. Just to stand. If the armor of God is necessary just to stand, or just to pray, how much more is it absolutely necessary if we are to worship the one true and the living God?

Turn in your Bibles to 1 Timothy chapter 1 and look at verse 18. The Apostle Paul said to Timothy, “This charge I commit unto thee, son Timothy, according to the prophecies which went before on thee, that thou by them mightest war a good warfare.”

Timothy was a preacher, and the Apostle Paul says that he is to war a good warfare. Even though he was a preacher, Timothy was in a war, and Paul urged him to war a good warfare. But it is not just preachers. In 2 Timothy 2:3-4, he tells not only Timothy but, by application, all Christians: “Thou therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life, that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier.” He tells Timothy again, and by application all Christians, to endure hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. He likens the Christian life to one who wars, saying that the man who truly wars does not entangle himself, in order that he may please Him who has chosen him to be a soldier.

There is an old English hymn that used to be sung regularly by the saints, though it is not sung much anymore. We have forgotten that we are saints, that we are soldiers, and certainly that we are to be soldier saints. We have also forgotten that the Christian life is basically one of constant warfare. The hymn is “Onward, Christian Soldiers”:

“Onward, Christian soldiers, marching as to war, With the cross of Jesus going on before. Christ, the royal Master, leads against the foe; Forward into battle, see His banners go. At the sign of triumph Satan’s host doth flee; On, then, Christian soldiers, on to victory. Hell’s foundations quiver at the shout of praise; Brothers, lift your voices, loud your anthems raise. Like a mighty army moves the Church of God; Brothers, we are treading where the saints have trod. We are not divided, all one body we, One in hope and doctrine, one in charity. Crowns and thorns may perish, kingdoms rise and wane, But the Church of Jesus constant will remain. Gates of hell can never ’gainst that Church prevail. We have Christ’s own promise, and that cannot fail. Onward, then, ye people, join our happy throng; Blend with ours your voices in the triumph song. Glory, laud, and honor unto Christ the King; This through countless ages men and angels sing.”

SCRIPTURE READING - Exodus 15:1-13 (KJV)

The second stanza illustrates worship as warfare: “At the sign of triumph, Satan's host doth flee. All men Christian soldiers on to victory. Hell's foundations quiver at the shout of praise. Brothers lift your voices, loud your anthems raise.” Praise, songs, and anthems are involved in worship.

Worship at the Destruction of God's Enemies

Notice what Israel did as Pharaoh's armies were destroyed. Exodus 15:1: “Then sang Moses and the children of Israel this song unto the Lord, and spake, saying, I will sing unto the Lord, for He has triumphed gloriously. The horse and his rider hath He thrown into the sea. The Lord is my strength and song. He has become my salvation. He is my God. And I will prepare Him a habitation, my Father's God, and I will exalt Him. The Lord is a man of war. The Lord is His name. Pharaoh's chariots and his host hath he cast into the sea. His chosen captains are drowned in the Red Sea.

“The depths have covered them. They sank into the bottom as a stone. Thy right hand, O Lord, has become glorious in power. Thy right hand, O Lord, hath dashed in pieces the enemy. And in the greatness of thine excellence hast thou overthrown them that rose up against thee. Thou sentest forth thy wrath, which consumed them as stubble. And with a blast of my nostrils the waters were gathered together, the floods stood upright as in heap, and the depths were congealed in the heart of the sea. The enemy said, I will pursue, I will overtake, I will divide the spoil, my lust shall be satisfied upon them, I will draw my sword, my hand shall destroy them. Thou didst blow with thy wind, the sea covered them, they sank as lead in the mighty waters. Who is likened to Thee, O Lord, among the gods? Who is likened to Thee, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders? Thou stretchest out Thy right hand, and the earth swallowed them. Thou in Thy mercy hast led forth the people which Thou hast redeemed.”

Thou hast guided them in Thy strength into Thy holy habitation. And the people shall hear and be afraid. Sorrow shall take hold on

the inhabitants of Palestina. Then the dukes of Edom shall be amazed. The mighty men of Moab trembling shall take hold upon them. All the inhabitants of Canaan shall melt away. Fear and dread shall fall upon them. By the greatness of thine arm thou shalt be. They shall be as still as a stone till thy people pass over, O Lord, till the people pass over which thou hast purchased. Thou shalt bring them and plant them in the mountain of thine inheritance, in the place of O Lord which thou hast made for thee to dwell in, and the sanctuary, O Lord, which thy hands have established. The Lord shall reign for ever and ever.

And the horse of Pharaoh went in with his chariots and with his horsemen into the sea, and the Lord brought again the waters upon the sea upon them, but the children of Israel went on dry ground in the midst of the sea. And Miriam the prophetess, the sister of Aaron, took a timbrel in her hand, and all the women went out after her with timbrels, and with dances, and Miriam answered them, Sing ye to the Lord, for he hath triumphed gloriously, the horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea.

Not only is worship as warfare, but worship is warfare. Worship is especially due unto God, not only at the redemption and deliverance of His people, but at the destruction of His enemies. Rejoicing is part of worship, and rejoicing is to be done specifically by the people of God at the destruction of the Lord's enemies.

There is more to worship than simply coming into a building, sitting down, and listening to a sermon. There is more to worship than simply saying, “I'm giving my tithe; I'm giving my offering.” Watch carefully what the Bible says about giving God glory at the destruction of His enemies. David prays against the enemies of God: “Break their teeth, O God, in their mouth: break out the great teeth of the young lions, O Lord.”

“Let them melt away as waters which run continually. When He bendeth His bow to shoot His arrows, let them be as cut in pieces. God doesn't miss. As a snail which melteth, let every one of them pass away, like the untimely birth of a woman, that they may not see the sun. Before your pots can feel the thorns, He shall take them away as with a whirlwind, both living and in His wrath.”

“The righteous shall rejoice when He seeth the vengeance. He shall wash His feet in the blood of the wicked, so that a man shall say, Verily, there is a reward for the righteous. Verily, He is a God that judgeth.” Where? In the earth. In the earth. What are the righteous going to do? They're going to rejoice when they see God's righteous vengeance upon His enemies, rejoicing as part of worship.

In Revelation chapter 19, verses 1 through 6: “And after these things I heard a great voice of much people in heaven saying, Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and honor and power unto the Lord our God. For true and righteous are His judgments. For he hath judged the great whore, which did corrupt the earth with her fornication, and hath avenged the blood of his servants at her hand. And again they said, Hallelujah! And her smoke rose up for ever and ever. And the four and twenty elders and the four beasts fell down and worshipped God that sat on the throne, saying, Amen, Hallelujah! And the voice came out of the throne, saying, Praise our God, all you servants, and ye that fear him, both small and great.” Verse 6: “And I heard, as it were, a voice of a great multitude, and as the voice of many waters, and the voice of mighty thundering, saying, Hallelujah, for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth.” Notice praise, honor, and worship at the destruction of the Lord's enemies. That means this: worship is warfare. Worship is to be given to the glorious Lord at the destruction of His enemies.

Why should we not consider worship as warfare now, even while He is conquering His enemies? Do you remember that passage in 1 Corinthians 15, verse 21, where we are told, “For He must reign till He has put all His enemies under His feet”? What is He doing now? He is reigning now. He is subduing. He is conquering. He is putting all of His enemies under His feet. Christ is just as victorious while He is subduing as He is when He will have subdued all things.

Now let me ask you a question. What is it that the enemy really desires? I am not just talking about the enemy of God, God’s enemies, but about our enemies as well. Think about it. The enemy of God—and you can say the enemies as well—really and truly desire worship. They want the worship, honor, and recognition that belong to God alone. I am going to prove that to you just momentarily.

The Enemy's Desire for Worship

Unhappily, many years ago, the comedian Flip Wilson made popular a very well-known saying: “The devil made me do it.” Consequently, since then, and probably even before then, numerous people have blamed their sins—their fornication, drunkenness, lying, cheating, and stealing—upon the devil. They say, “The devil made me do it,” or, “The devil tempted me.” Well, let me tell you something, folks. Evil powers do not need to tempt you to commit fornication, get drunk, lie, cheat, or steal. That is really not even the enemy’s territory. How can I say that? Turn back in your Bibles to the book of Galatians.

The problem is this: the enemy does not need to tempt you to do those things, because your flesh already tempts you to do those things. Here it is spelled out in Galatians 5:19: “Now the works of the flesh are these, their manifest, which are these, adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulation, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revelings, and such like, which I tell you before have I also told you in time past that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.”

Now did he just not tell you what the works of the flesh were? This is what your flesh desires. This is what your flesh will do without the temptation of the evil powers. Your flesh tempts you to do these things. Now let me show you, and let me emphasize what the enemy actually desires. Turn back in your Bibles to Matthew chapter 4. I want to read to you the temptation of Christ so that you can see it. Notice Matthew chapter 4, beginning with verse 1. Matthew 4 and verse 1, the Word of God states: “Then was Jesus led up of the spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil. And when he had fasted forty days and forty nights, he was afterward and hungered. And when the tempter came to him, he said, If thou be the Son of God, I don't know if you remember this or not, but I preached on this passage several years back.”

But the “if” here is not a question. The Greek construction is a with the indicative, which means this could be translated as “since thou art.” So it is a statement of fact. He says, “If thou be the Son of God,” or, “Since thou art the Son of God, command that these stones

be made bread." And he answered and said, "It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God."

Then the devil taketh Him up into the holy city, and setteth Him on a pinnacle of the temple, and saith, "If," or "since thou art, the Son of God, cast thyself down. For it is written, He shall give His angels charge concerning thee, and in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone." Jesus said unto him, "It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God."

Watch verse 8. Again, the devil taketh Him up into an exceeding high mountain, and showeth Him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them, and saith unto Him, "All these things will I give thee, thou wilt fall down and worship me." Then said Jesus unto him, "Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and Him only shalt thou serve."

By our Lord's obedience to His Father, what did He receive? Everything. He is Lord of everything. What was Satan doing? Satan was saying, "I'll give this to you. You don't have to go through all that suffering. You don't have to go through all that will be. You just fall down and worship me."

What is it that the enemy really, genuinely desires? The enemy really desires worship, honor, and recognition. They want exactly what belongs to God. So the end result of this temptation was to get Christ to worship the enemy.

Ephesians 6:12 says, "For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places." Unhappily, many times people read that and simply think, "We're struggling against evil spirits, satanic power, and that's our main battle." That may be true. But do not think for one instant that this negates, nullifies, or rules out physical enemies. Who is controlled by evil powers when they are wicked, rebellious, and ungodly? Evil men. In other words, the evil power inspires, motivates, empowers, and controls them to live in rebellion to God.

It is not just Satan who wants the worship of God; it is those who follow him. In Matthew 21, our Lord gives the parable of the vineyard: “Hear another parable. There was a certain householder which planted a vineyard and hedged it round about and digged a winepress in it, and built a tower, and let it out to husbandmen, and went into a far country. And when the time of the fruit drew near, he sent his servants to the husbandmen, that they might receive the fruits of it. And the husbandmen took his servants, and beat one, and killed another, and stoned another. Again, he sent other servants more than the first, and they did unto them likewise. But last of all, he sent unto them his sons, saying, They will reverence my son.”

“But when the husbandmen saw the Son, they said among themselves, This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and let us seize on his inheritance. And they caught him and cast him out of the vineyard and slew him.” What did the evil husbandmen want? That which belonged to the Son. They wanted His inheritance. What did our Lord inherit? Worship, honor, power, glory, and control.

In Mark 12:7, the same parable says, “But those husbandmen said among themselves, This is the heir. Come, let us kill him, and the inheritance shall be ours.” We will have it. It will belong to us. So what do wicked rulers and wicked men want? The worship, honor, and glory that belong to God.

I am trying to set the stage to show you something: worship is warfare. When you come into the building, you should come not only to give honor, glory, and worship to the one true and living God through His Son Jesus Christ, but also to do battle and war with any and everyone and everything that opposes Him.

Worldly Opposition to Christ's Reign

Look in your Bibles to Psalm 2. I want you to grasp clearly the situation presented there. Look at the first three verses: “Why do the heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing?” The word vain means that which is useless and worthless. Now let me show you what is useless and worthless, yet they are imagining it. Verse 2.

“The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord and against His anointed,” saying, “Let us

break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us." The kings of the earth, the civil rulers, set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together. What are they taking counsel together for? Against the Lord and against His anointed, that is, Jesus Christ. They do not like the boundaries, bands, and limitations that have been placed upon them by the sovereign God. Let me say it more plainly: they do not want to be in subjection to God; they want to be God. They do not want to be recognized as servants of God. They want to be worshipped as God.

Since God is sovereign and exercises sovereign control over everything, if men claim to be God, then they have to exercise that control over everything and everyone as well. Now you see why there are so many bureaucracies, regulations, statutes, laws, and airheads: they are playing God.

Acts 4 shows us this same truth. "And when they heard that, they lifted up their voice to God, and will and accord said, Lord, thou art God who has made heaven and earth, and has seen all that is in them is. Who by the mouth of thy servant David hath said, Why did the heathen rage, and the people imagine vain things? Now watch, the kings of the earth stood up, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord and against His Christ. For of a truth against Thy holy child Jesus, whom Thou hast anointed both Herod and Pontius Pilate with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel were gathered together, for to do whatsoever Thy hand and Thy counsel determined before to be done."

What did Luke do? He took Psalm 2, verses 1 through 3, and said this is exactly what they did when they crucified Christ. Why did they crucify Christ? I am not talking about the fact that it was ordained by God, but think about it from a human standpoint. They wanted Him out of the way. What did the Sadducees and the Pharisees say? If we let this man live, the Romans are going to come and take away both our place and our nation. We will lose our power. We will lose everything.

Consider Matthew 2:8. If Herod the Great had had his way, Christ would have been dead much earlier. After the wise men came and said, "We have seen his star," Herod deceitfully and cunningly sent them to Bethlehem, saying, "Go and search diligently for the young

child; and when ye have found him, bring me word again, that I may come and worship him also." Did Herod really want to come and worship Christ?

The answer is no. He wanted to find where Christ was so that he could murder Him. This is plain because, when the wise men returned by another way and Herod discovered that they were not coming back, he had all the children from two years of age and under murdered. His plan was to do away with Christ.

Historical and Modern Persecution of Worship

So here is the question: Do men fight against Christ—His rules, His reign, and His people? Most assuredly they do. In fact, that is what is going on today. In practically every war, you can see evidence of men fighting against Christ, His rule, and His reign.

For instance, during the American War for Independence, Trinity Church in New York was burned in 1776. The British seized all the non-Anglican churches in the city and used them as prisons and barracks. They fenced off Trinity Church's churchyard, hung lanterns in it, and used it as a pleasure garden where they could drink and play. St. George's Episcopal Church in Schenectady, New York, was also used as a barracks by the British.

A little closer to home, consider Pastor Moses Allen of Midway, Georgia. General Augustine Prevost, military commander of the British East Florida headquarters at St. Augustine, not only dispersed the people of his church but burned the church building to the ground, along with other dwelling houses. When Savannah fell, Moses Allen was captured and put on a prison ship. The British destroyed over 52 churches, looting, burning, and abusing the facilities.

The Yankees did the same thing in the South. Many pastors were arrested. Pews, pulpits, and church furniture were chopped up and used for firewood. Buildings were used as barracks, corrals for horses, and hospitals. What were men saying? We have no respect for Christ, no respect for God, and no respect for any of His people, His rule, or His reign. When you read what many states and counties

are doing today in fighting against Christ, I hope you understand that worship is warfare.

Let me give you two illustrations. In Phoenix, Arizona, the Rutherford Institute came to the defense of a man fined $12,000 and serving a 60-day sentence for using his home to host a weekly Bible study, allegedly violating city building codes. Institute attorneys challenged the sentence under the First Amendment right to religious freedom and assembly. The city claimed that Bible studies or any form of religious worship in a residence required compliance with local laws governing a public church, including a permit and license. Michael and Suzanne Salmon had hosted Bible studies for family and friends since 2005, eventually building a 2,000-square-foot structure in their backyard. Thus the man was fined $12,000 and sentenced to 60 days for holding a Bible study on his own property, in his own home.

In Orange County, California, a Southern California couple was fined $300 for holding Christian Bible studies at home and could face another $500 fine for each additional gathering. San Juan Capistrano officials said Chuck and Stephanie Fromm violated Municipal Code 9-3.301, which prohibits religious, fraternal, and nonprofit organizations in residential neighborhoods without a permit. Stephanie hosted a Wednesday Bible study with about 20 attendees, and Chuck held a Sunday service attended by about 50. Their appeals were denied, and future sessions were threatened with heftier penalties. The Pacific Justice Institute, defending them in a lawsuit, said Chuck Fromm was also told that regular meetings or gatherings of three or more people required a costly, difficult-to-obtain conditional use permit.

I like his wife's attitude. She said, “How dare they tell us we can't have whatever we want in our own home. We want to be able to use our home. We paid a lot and invested a lot in our home and backyard, and we should be able to use it and be hospitable in our home.” I agree, one hundred percent. But can you see how, in just about every state and county, you cannot have these Bible studies now? You have to have a permit.

Do you realize that the states and counties taking this attitude are siding with King Herod in his attitude and conduct? In Luke 23:11,

here was Herod's attitude and conduct: “with his men of war, set him at naught, and mocked him, and arrayed him in a gorgeous robe, and sent him again to Pilate.” What did they do? They set Him at naught: “You're nothing. We'll mock you. We will laugh at you. We'll make fun of you. We will ridicule you. We will scorn you.”

That is the attitude those in power today have toward Christ and Christianity. If we worship Christ as He is fully and freely revealed in His Word, as the Sovereign God of heaven and earth, we will be warring against those who oppose Christ and scorn Him. You remember that our Lord said it very plainly in Matthew 12:30: “He that is not with me is against me. And he that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad.” There is no neutrality and no middle ground. There's no king's ex. You are either with Christ or against Him. Isn't that simple?

When some airhead says, “We're just trying to uphold the law because the law is written,” I don't care what the law is written. If it is contrary to God's Word and contrary to Jesus Christ, the law is wrong. You can try to uphold every statute and regulation that you like, but you are still against Christ if you are working against His Word, His people, and His truth.

The Scope of Our Warfare

You remember the passage I quoted in Ephesians 6:12, where the Apostle Paul talks about fighting against principalities and powers, spiritual wickedness in high places. I want you to think, because I am trying to teach you that war, warfare, and worship go together. Worship is warfare. Albert Barnes said this: “It is a war on a large scale with the entire kingdom of darkness over the world. Yet in maintaining the warfare, the struggle will be with such portions of that kingdom as we come in contact with and will actually relate.”

The warfare is basically over the entire kingdom of darkness in the entire world. Can you and I fight the darkness in the entire world? The answer is no. We may pray against it, but we cannot actually fight against it. There is, however, wickedness that we come in contact with on a daily basis, which we can fight against.

He lists five things with which we can fight. First, we fight our own sinful propensities, which are part of the kingdom of darkness. Isn't it amazing that we are inclined to have wrong motives and wrong desires? We have to fight against those things; that is a daily struggle. What did the Apostle Paul say? “I die daily.” Then he went on to say, “So fight I, not as one that beateth the air.” He was not a shadow boxer; he fought to keep his body under subjection. We have to fight against our own sinful propensity.

Second, we have to war with the evil passions of others—their pride, ambition, and spirit of revenge—which are also a part of that kingdom. When you listen to that—pride, ambition, and a spirit of revenge—how can you not think of bureaucrats? I realize this is in a lot of people, and it is in everybody, but it is preeminent in some.

Third, we have to war against the evil customs, laws, opinions, employments, and pleasures of the world, which are also part of that dark kingdom. Think of the evil customs and the evil laws, regulations, and statutes. I showed Alice a video on YouTube, which I think was in San Jose, California. Three or four cops body-slammed and beat a fourteen-year-old boy for skateboarding on the wrong side of the street. By the time they finished, there were probably a dozen cops and cop cars everywhere, while they told everybody, “Disperse, disperse.” They broke his cheek, I think, and did two or three for skateboarding on the wrong side of the street.

Fourth, we have to war against error, superstition, and false doctrine, which are also part of that kingdom. There is plenty of that. Fifth, we war against the wickedness of the heathen world, the sins of benighted nations, also a part of that kingdom. Why did he not simply say, “with the wickedness of America”? There are other wicked nations, I understand that. But listen to what he said.

With the wickedness of the heathen world and the sins of benighted nations, also a part of that kingdom, wherever we come in contact with evil, whether in our hearts or elsewhere, there we make war.

Victory in Christ and the Call to Fight

I want to give you some encouragement. In Revelation 17:14, the Bible says, “These, the wicked, shall make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb shall overcome them. For He is Lord of lords and King of kings, and they that are with Him are called, chosen, and faithful.” The Lord shall overcome them. Revelation 19:11 says, “And I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse, and he that sat upon him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he doth judge and make war.”

Worship is warfare. When we come to worship God, positively and negatively, we war against anyone and anything that is contrary to the one true and living God. When we enter to worship, we engage the enemies of Christ. We learn to plead the way our Lord taught us: “Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name. Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done in earth as it is in heaven.”

Do you realize that when you are praying for the fullness and manifestation of the kingdom of Christ, you are also praying for the overthrow of all the kingdoms that are against Christ? Worship is warfare.

Isaac Watts, a great hymn writer, wrote the hymn “Am I a Soldier of the Cross?” Listen:

“Am I a soldier of the cross, a follower of the Lamb? Or shall I fear it on His cause or blush to speak His name? Must I be carried to the skies on flowery beds of ease, while others fought to win the prize and sail through bloody seas? Are there no foes for me to face? Must I not stem the flood? Is this vile world a friend of grace to help me unto God? Sure, I must fight if I would reign. Increase my courage, Lord.

“I'll bear the toil, endure the pain, supported by Thy Word. When the illustrious day shall rise, and all Thine armies shine, in robes of victory through the skies, all the glory shall be Thine.”

I love that second stanza: “Must I be carried to the skies on flowery beds of ease while others fought to win their prize and sail through bloody seas? Are there no foes for me to fight? Must I not stem the flood?”

Is this vile world a friend of grace to help me unto God? What is the answer? No. So we must fight. Worship is warfare.

Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we bow before Thee, and we thank You for Your Word, for Your truth, for Your greatness and Your kindness. Lord, I pray that You would indeed make us real, genuine soldiers of the cross. Help us, Lord, to watch and to march onward as the soldiers of Jesus Christ. Give us grace that we may serve Thee acceptably with reverence and godly fear. May we fight to bring our minds and our bodies in subjection and conformity to Thee. May we be holy and godly. We are thankful that we are already more than conquerors through Jesus Christ, and we are the victors by His grace and by His mercy. We give Thee praise and honor and worship, for Thou art God of gods, and King of kings, and Lord of lords. Besides Thee, there is none else. We give Thee praise through our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, in whose name we pray. Amen.

CHAPTER 13

Richard Cameron The Lion of The Covenant

SCRIPTURE READING - Hebrews 11:32-40 (KJV)

Introduction: The Importance of History and Faith

We deprive ourselves of a great deal of truth by not studying history—not only biblical history, but what you and I would simply call history in general—because God is the God of history. All history belongs to Him. In fact, history is linear. It has a definite beginning and a definite ending, and history is nothing less than God's eternal decree coming to pass in time. Therefore, history is indeed important.

The Word of God says:

"And what shall I more say? for the time would fail me to tell of Gideon, and of Barak, and of Samson, and of Jephthae; of David also, and Samuel, and of the prophets: Who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, Quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made

> strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens. Women received their dead raised to life again: and others were tortured, not accepting deliverance; that they might obtain a better resurrection: And others had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment: They were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword: they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented; (Of whom the world was not worthy:) they wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth. And these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise: God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect."
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> Not every hero of faith is listed in Hebrews chapter 11. There were many heroes of faith who lived during the New Testament era who were not listed there. Likewise, there have been many biblical heroes of faith who have lived and died since New Testament times who certainly are not recorded in Scripture. Could not possibly be because the canon had been closed. Yet we have the history of these saints who stood, who lived for Christ, and who died for Christ. These were individuals who stood firm in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Richard Cameron was one such martyr. Most people have never heard of Richard Cameron, known as the Lion of the Covenant. He was a Scottish Presbyterian, and consequently many people do not know the incidents surrounding his martyrdom. We live in a day where principles and convictions are usually a thing of the past. Even when principles and convictions do exist, most people do not think they are worth suffering for, and especially not worth dying for.

Thankfully, there are some who do not hold that position. They understand that truth is truth and is worth fighting for. It is worth dying for as well. No one likes to suffer. In fact, we want everything extremely comfortable. Most people are willing to do a lot of things as long as comfort is involved. I am thinking of that verse in Hosea where God condemns Israel because they sacrificed under oak trees

because the shade thereof was good. In other words, they were going to worship their pagan idols, but they wanted to be cool and comfortable as they did that as well.

The Gift of Suffering for Christ

However, there is a principle in Scripture that teaches us that the right way is not always the easy way. It is not always the cool and comfortable way. Look in Hebrews chapter 11, beginning with verse 24. Notice what the Bible says concerning Moses: “By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter.”

He refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter. What he was refusing was the throne of Egypt, one of the wealthiest and most powerful countries in the world at that time. He was not interested in following after Pharaoh. Notice what the Bible says: “Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; Esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompence of the reward. By faith he forsook Egypt.” Moses chose rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season. He chose affliction over the pharaohship and all the treasures of Egypt because he esteemed the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt.

For he had respect unto the recompense of the reward. In other words, Moses saw the beauty and the wonder of salvation in the one true and the living God. No one will ever choose suffering and affliction and persecution until he understands and rightly estimates the beauty, glory, and grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. Moses was willing to suffer, for he esteemed the reproach of Christ greater than all the treasures of Egypt.

The Bible says in Philippians 1:29, “For unto you it is given not only to believe on Christ, but also to suffer for his sake.” That verse teaches us that not only is faith the gift of God, but suffering is likewise the gift of God. Not only does God not give faith to every individual; He does not give suffering to every individual. Just as there are degrees in faith—we read about little faith and great faith, a small faith—so likewise there are degrees in suffering.

God does not call upon each one to suffer immeasurably. Some do; that is a fact. But some do not. Just as God gives faith, God also gives the gift of suffering. To some individuals He gives the greater gift of suffering, and they suffer immeasurably. But you must remember that those who suffer greater also have greater grace and greater mercy given to them.

Consider how God has chosen some to suffer. Many will remember the conversion of Saul of Tarsus. He had been convicted and converted by the Lord. When the Lord told Ananias to go and see Saul, Ananias protested. But the Lord said unto him, “Go thy way. For he, that is Saul, who became the apostle Paul, he is a chosen vessel unto me to bear my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel.”

Then the Lord said, “For I will show him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake.” What did God say? “I will show him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake.” Here are a few of the things the Apostle Paul suffered. Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 11:24, “Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one.”

“Thrice was I beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Thrice I suffered shipwreck. A night and day I've been in the deep. In journeyings often, in perils in waters, in perils of robbers, in perils of mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren. In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness, besides those things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches.” Notice that the Apostle Paul is listing only a small number of the things which he suffered. Moreover, you remember that he had his head chopped off in the end.

Like Paul, many in Scotland and England were persecuted for their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Many sought to leave those countries so that they might freely worship the Lord in liberty and freedom. Each one in this room knows about the Mayflower. Those pilgrims made it from England to Holland, and from Holland here to America. But what many people do not understand is that King Charles Stuart forced, or caused, those people to go because of his persecution.

Historical Context: The Killing Time and the Covenanters

Certainly, the king probably meant it for evil in one sense of the word, but God meant it for good. Charles, of the divine right, imperiously began forbidding people to leave either Scotland or England. Had Charles I really known what he was doing, he would never have done it, because two of the men scheduled to leave on the next ship were Oliver Cromwell and John Hampden. When Charles I forbade others to leave the country, he sealed his own destiny. Those two men were most responsible for charging him with treason and insisting that his head be cut off. You talk about divine justice. Charles I retained in that country the very men who would bring about his own death because of his sin. This period is known as the Killing Time for the Covenanters, because many were killed for their faith in Jesus Christ. Let me give you a quick illustration of what it was like to live during the time of Richard Cameron.

We are talking about the 1670s and the 1680s. Here is a Covenanter's wedding. John Brown was a very close friend, not only of Richard Cameron, who was known as the Lion of the Covenant, but also of Alexander Peden, who was known as the Prophet of the Covenant. Peden had married John Brown to Isabel Weir in 1682. After the marriage ceremony, Alexander Peden said to Isabel:

“You have a good man to be your husband, but ye will not enjoy him long. Prize his company, and keep linen by you for his winding sheet, for you will need it when you're not looking for it, and it will be a bloody one.”

What an amazing thing to say right after a marriage ceremony. A few short years later, Lord Claverhouse, the murderer, hunted down John Brown and asked why he did not attend the Anglican or Episcopal Church and whether he would not pray for the king. John Brown gave the usual covenant answer, at which Claverhouse exclaimed, “Go to your knees, you shall immediately die.” John Brown prayed so fervently that the dragoon's eyes began to moisten.

After he finished praying, he turned to his wife and said, “Do you remember at the time that I proposed to you, I told you that this might come to pass? I must ask now, are you willing to part with

me?" Her reply was, "Heartily willing." John Brown then said, "This then is all I desire. I have nothing else to do but to die." He kissed his children and said, "May all purchased and promised blessings be upon you."

Claverhouse shouted, "No more of this!" and ordered his five or six dragoons to fire. But the dragoons stood motionless. They refused to murder John Brown. Claverhouse became enraged, and, fearing mutiny among his own troops, drew a pistol from his belt, pointed it at John Brown's head, pulled the trigger, and blew his brains out. Then he looked at Isabel and said, "What do you think of your husband now?"

She replied, "I ever thought much good of him, and more so even now." Isabel Brown set her child upon the ground, gathered up her husband's brains, tied his head together, straightened his body, covered it with a sheet, and sat on the ground and wept. Those were the kinds of times in which Richard Cameron lived. Richard Cameron was much like the Apostle Paul. Not only did he suffer in life as Paul suffered, but he also lost his life at the hands of the enemies of the Gospel of Christ, just as Paul did. Richard Cameron was a Scottish Covenanter.

Who Were the Covenanters?

The Covenanters were basically Scottish Presbyterians who, during the seventeenth century, supported the National Covenant of 1638. That covenant declared that Jesus Christ was the head of the church. The National Covenant opposed the king's attempts to establish a Scottish Episcopalian Church, something like the Anglican Church in England.

The Covenanters believed that Jesus Christ alone was the head of the church, that Jesus Christ alone was the head of the conscience, and that Jesus Christ alone was Lord. They refused the king's claim to be head of the conscience and head of the church, declaring that he had no right or power to direct or lead the church, or to force it to do anything. Consequently, those who held this conviction were cast out of the churches by the king. The churches that remained in existence were supplied with preachers who agreed to go along with the king.

Many of these preachers were outcasts, cast out of their churches, and hence they began to preach in the open fields. When people met together there, they were called conventicles. Because so many preachers had been cast out and so many people believed the truth, refusing to go to the King's Church, they met in these conventicles. In 1670, these conventicles were declared illegal.

In 1678, an act was passed to enable military forces to be raised for the suppression of these conventicles. Here was a military force being raised just to put down the preaching of the gospel, and to put down men who did not agree with the king or follow what he said concerning religion. Moreover, a law demanded a cess, which was a tax to support the military raised to persecute the field preachers and those attending the conventicles.

In other words, the people were forced to pay for their own persecution and destruction. It was a tax applied to the faithful; but if payment was refused, the King's Dragoons had their commission to plunder and kill. Some Scottish and English believers submitted at the point of the bayonet. Others refused, and gave their lives in doing so.

James Gavin had his ears cut off and was banished to Barbados for his beliefs. Donald Cargill, James Guthrie, John Nisbet, David Haxton, and many others lost their lives as well. Richard Cameron and his younger brother Michael, whom you will hear about, were together in their death. They also had a sister named Marion, who lost her life at the hands of the King's troopers.

Richard Cameron was a preacher of the gospel, and his bold preaching remained a treasured memory for those who heard him long after he was put to death. His willingness to die for the right of Christ to rule His church emboldened many Scottish Covenanters to persevere in their faith. When you stop and think about a man like Richard Cameron, David Haxton, or James Guthrie, their bold preaching and stand for Jesus Christ should indeed embarrass most of us today. Their lives, and even their deaths, rebuke our compromise, our lukewarmness, our unwillingness to stand for Christ, and our unwillingness to take up His cross.

These men knew what it was to suffer and to stand. They believed that Jesus Christ, and Jesus Christ alone, was king—not only king of the conscience and king of the church, but king of the nation and king of everything. They were willing to fight and die for the kingship of Christ.

That is why one of the slogans of those days was, “For Christ’s crown and covenant.” Henry Inglis wrote a couplet that summarizes the life and death of Richard Cameron:

“Cameron of the covenant stood and prayed the battle prayer. Then with his brother side by side, took up the cross of Christ and died upon the moss of Ayr.”

One of the main Reformers in Scotland was John Knox, a tremendous preacher feared by Bloody Mary. She said that she feared the prayers of John Knox more than all the troops of Scotland, and rightly so. Knox taught that it was the right and duty of a lesser magistrate to resist the tyranny of higher magistrates. In other words, a lower magistrate could resist the king or queen in their tyranny and totalitarianism.

When it came to Richard Cameron and all these other Covenanters, they were simply applying the teaching, preaching, and doctrine of John Knox. Richard Cameron was born approximately in 1648, and he gave his life on July 22, 1680. He was a leader of the Presbyterians who resisted the Stuart monarchs and their attempts to control the affairs of the Church of Scotland through bishops.

His followers took the name of Cameronians. Even after Richard Cameron’s death, the Cameronians became known as the Scottish Rifles, and the Scottish Rifles, or Cameronians, were not disbanded until 1968. Thus, the movement continued from 1680 to 1968.

Alan Cameron was the father of Richard and Michael. He was a merchant in Falkland, Fife, and had three sons, of whom Richard was the eldest. Michael and Alexander were also believers, and they followed the covenanting banner of blue, the blue banner of the covenants. The only daughter, Marian, was a sincere Christian woman who also died at the hands of the king’s dragoons. After his university days, Richard Cameron was a schoolmaster, but at that

point he did not know the Savior. Richard Cameron then did something that many people did in those days.

Richard Cameron's Conversion and Ordination

He would go out and occasionally listen to the field preachers, to the outcast. He would go to some of those conventicles. One day, as he listened, he heard unto life. The Lord regenerated him, convicted him, and converted him. When God saved him, he became exceedingly zealous and what you and I would call white hot for the gospel of Jesus Christ. Richard Cameron was one of those individuals who had absolutely no use for anything lukewarm. By his sincere and genuine example, he stood up many in that day. Even just before his death, people were testifying to the blessings of God in his ministry and upon their lives through him.

Richard Cameron, also known as Ritchie, soon left Scotland temporarily to study theology in Holland. You have to remember that Holland was where many of these Puritans and pilgrim preachers went for safety, in order that they might teach, preach, and worship freely. While he was there, he was ordained a minister in the Church of Scotland. In 1679, he was ordained at the Scotch Church in Rotterdam. He was in safe Holland and had been studying theology, but even there he had a longing to go back to Scotland, then known as the Land of Blood.

Here is the ordination of a Scottish Covenanter. During the ceremony, after Brown and Coleman, a Dutch minister, lifted their hands from Cameron's head, the great Robert McWard kept his hand upon Cameron's head and said this: “Richard, the public standard of the gospel has fallen in Scotland. And if I know anything of the mind of the Lord, ye are called to undergo your trials before us and go home and lift up the fallen standard and display it before the world. But before you put your hand to it, you shall go to as many of the field ministers as you can find and give them your hearty invitation to go with you. And if they will not go, go you alone, and the Lord will go with you.”

“Behold, you spectators, here is the head of a faithful minister and servant of Jesus Christ, who shall lose the same for his master's

interest, and it shall be set up before the sun and the moon in the public view of the world."

Here is the head of a faithful minister of Jesus Christ who shall lose the same for his Master's interest. Then the great McWard said, "That is his head, and it shall be set up before the sun and the moon in the public view of the world." Such was the ordination of a Scottish Covenanter. Secretly, Richard Cameron got back to Scotland in October of 1679.

Very soon his name was associated with Cargill, Welwood, and Hall, who were all martyred: Donald Cargill, a blessed, singular Christian and faithful minister and martyr; Henry Hall, a worthy gentleman, martyr and partaker of Christ's sufferings; and John Welwood, who, seeing the last day from his cold den in his native hills, said, "Welcome, eternal light; no more night or darkness for me." The course of Richard Cameron was much like a blazing meteor.

He did not have long to live, and while he was there he certainly shone brightly. He was fiercely hunted, but kindly housed. Although there was an exceedingly high price placed upon his head, no one would betray him. He was closely sought, yet forever sheltered, and greatly loved, even to his death, with his brother Michael by his side. Thousands hung on to his sermons, weeping as he preached. Many times, Richard Cameron himself wept as he preached. His sermons were always full of the warm welcome and love of the Lord Jesus Christ to poor, simple sinners. In closing one sermon, after talking about Jesus Christ, he asked, "Would you take Him? Tell us what you say."

Cameron's Preaching and the Sanquhar Declaration

"These hills and mountains around us witness that we have offered Him to you this day. Angels are wondering at this offer. They stand beholding with admiration that our Lord is giving you such an offer this day. They will go up and report at the throne what is everyone's choice—whether you would have Him or whether you would not."

He preached from such texts as Jeremiah 3:19: "But I said, How shall I put thee among the children, and give thee a pleasant land

and a goodly heritage of the hosts of the nations?" He preached from Matthew 11:28: "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." He preached from Isaiah 32:2: "And a man shall be as an hiding place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest." He preached from Isaiah 49:24.

"Shall the prey be taken from the mighty?" He preached from John 5:40, "Ye will not come unto me, that ye might have life." Here was an excellent and wonderful preacher, preaching with great passion and power. God's hand was indeed upon him. John Howie, in Scots Worthies, gives an incident concerning Richard Cameron. Cameron was preaching in a particular city, opposed not only by one singularly wicked individual, but also by two leaders there. As he preached, this wicked man and the two leaders challenged him.

Cameron told the people to remember that they were in the presence of a holy God and that all were hastening to an endless state of either weal or woe. At that point, Andrew Dalziel cried out, "Sir, we neither know you nor your God." Richard Cameron replied, "You and all who do not know my God in mercy shall know Him in His judgments, which shall be sudden and surprising in a few days upon you."

"And I, as a sent servant of Jesus Christ, whose commission I bear and whose badge I wear upon my breast, give you warning and leave you to the justice of God." A few days later, Andrew Dalziel, being in perfect health, ate a hearty breakfast; but as soon as he finished, he began to vomit and then died in a most frightful manner. The two leaders, understanding Dalziel's death, asked for a meeting with Cameron and asked his forgiveness. Cameron said that from his heart he forgave them for the wrongs they had done to him. But for the wrongs they had done to the interest of Christ, it was not his part to forgive them; he was persuaded that they would be remarkably punished for their sins. Soon both men were remarkably punished and died.

Here was a man who evidently had not only the power and blessing of God upon him, but also understood the justice of God in the midst of his sermons. He gave forth not only God's blessings and promises, but also warned of God's judgment. He always sought to make a covenant between those who heard him and the Lord Jesus

Christ. God rewarded his faithful preaching of the Word, and many came savingly to Christ through it. Cameron's preaching, praying, and practicing were all the same. He lived what he preached; he lived what he believed. It was while he was in Scotland that the famed Sanquhar Declaration came.

This was three weeks before the fierce battle of Airds Moss. Airds Moss is a place where a battle took place. Three weeks before the Sanquhar Declaration, Richard Cameron said, "I shall be but a breakfast to the enemies of Christ shortly." After a day of prayer, twelve days, "From the end," his word was this: "My body shall dung the wilderness within a fortnight."

He seldom prayed, whether at a meal, with a family, or with friends, except that he asked the Lord to give him patience to wait until the Lord's time came. It was right before the Sanquhar Declaration. In Sanquhar town, on June 12, 1680, Richard Cameron, along with his brother Michael and a few others, rode into town. When people saw them, they began to cry, "It's Ritchie, it's Ritchie, the hill men are coming." It was indeed Richard Cameron, known as the Lion of the Covenant, along with some of his faithful remnant. He and his brother Michael dismounted, while the others formed a circle around them. As the circle was completed, a psalm was sung and a prayer was offered. It was the first anniversary of what is known as the Bothwell Brig slaughter.

Where many Scottish Covenanters had been literally murdered by the forces of Charles I, Richard Cameron has an answer on this anniversary: the Sanquhar Declaration. His brother Michael opens it and reads it aloud before it is posted in Sanquhar town:

"Although we be for government and governors, such as the Word of God in our covenant allows, yet we for ourselves and all that will adhere to us as the representatives of the true Presbyterian Church and covenant nation of Scotland, considering the great hazard of lying under such a sin any longer, do by this disown Charles Stewart, who have been reigning, or rather tyrannizing, as we may say, on the throne of Britain these years bygone, as having any right, title to, or interest in the said crown of Scotland for government, as forfeited several years since by his perjury and breach of covenant both to God and his church, and usurpation of his crown and royal

prerogatives therein, and also as being under the standard of our Lord Jesus Christ, the captain of our salvation, to declare a war with such a tyrant and usurper and all the men of his practices as enemies of the Lord Jesus Christ and his cause and covenant, and against all such as have strengthened him, as also we disown by this the recent reception of the Duke of York, that professed Papist, as repugnant to the principles and vows to the Most High God."

They were for government and governors such as the Word of God and the covenant allowed, but not for tyrants. King Charles I had been reigning, or rather tyrannizing, for years. The Duke of York, whom they denounced as the Papist, had sneeringly said he would make Scotland a hunting field—that is, kill all the Scottish people he could kill. The Scottish people referred to him as the devil's lieutenant.

After the declaration was read, Thomas Campbell nailed it upon the wall. Another verse or two of Scripture was read, a psalm was sung, and those who had stood for righteousness left for the hills. What had they done? They had cast off the usurped authority of a tyrant, but not in anarchy or rebellion. They made their refusal a religious act, beginning with prayer, Scripture, and song, and ending with song. They disavowed Charles I and disowned the unworthy ruler that they might enthrone the sovereign, the Lord Jesus Christ. They refused a tyrant that they might honor Christ, the supreme ruler.

They were choosing a theocracy over a despotism. They were actually reversing 1 Samuel 8, where Israel cried, "Give us a man, that he may reign over us." They said, "No, we do not want a man to reign over us; we want God." It was a demonstration of Acts 5:29, where the Word of God is declared by the disciples: "We ought to obey God rather than man."

The last Sunday of his life, Cameron spent with Donald Cargill and preached from Psalm 46:10: "Be still, and know that I am God." During that sermon, Cameron said that the Lord was going to lift up a standard against Antichrist, and it would take it to the gates of Rome and burn it with fire; that blood would be their sign, and no quarter would be their word. He earnestly wished that it might begin in Scotland. The next Sunday, Donald Cargill preached, over Richard

Cameron's death, from the words, "Know you not that a great man and a princess fallen this day in Israel."

It was what the Covenanters called a time of eating the bread of affliction. Cameron's last week was lived with about sixty others. Patrick Walker, the Covenanter peddler, and the Covenanting John Bunyan wrote of it. Bunyan spent fourteen years in prison because he refused a license to preach; he was a Covenanter as well. Walker and Bunyan said that Cameron and the sixty men with him were "of one heart and soul, their company and converse being so edifying and sweet, and having no certain dwelling place, they stayed together, waiting for further light in that none such juncture of time."

They were somewhat armed, and about twenty had horses. Some feel they should not have taken up arms. Many Covenanters believed there was a better testimony to be gained by suffering than by resisting. Their outlawed ministers and writers counseled them to be as jewels surrounded by the cutting irons, and so to seal from their own experience the sweetness of suffering for Christ, since there is an inherent glory in suffering for Christ. But many others, while able to endure much themselves, could not endure seeing others subjected to the utmost miseries and cruelties; and it were as those when every man had his sword upon his thigh.

Some Scottish Covenanters said, "We will just suffer and die." Others said, "No, we will fight," not only to protect themselves, but also to protect others who were suffering. Anyone may think you cannot help but love these men, because they were so brave and glorious.

Richard Cameron, the Lion of the Covenant, spent his last night at Meadowhead Farm, the home of William Mitchell. In the morning, he washed his face and hands in the old stone trough. As he dried them, he looked at Mrs. Mitchell and her daughter and said, "This is their last washing. I have need to make them clean, for there are many to see them." Mrs. Mitchell wept. Seeing her weeping, he said, "Weep not for me, but for yourselves, and yours, and for the sins of a sinful land, for you have many melancholy and sorrowful weary days before you."

The Battle of Airds Moss and Martyrdom

That afternoon, about four o'clock, a hundred and twenty of the king's dragoons came upon the little Bible-reading band in Airds Moss. About sixty-two were praying and reading the Bible. The governmental troops outnumbered the Covenanters two to one and had not only greater numbers but greater arms. When Richard Cameron saw them coming, he led the little band in prayer three times, and each time prayed, "Spare the green and take the ripe."

Then he looked at his brother Michael and said, "Come, Michael, let us fight it out to the last. For this is the day that I have longed for, to die fighting against our Lord's avowed enemies. And this is the day that we shall get the crown." To his beloved fellows he said, "Be encouraged, all of you, to fight it out valiantly. For all of you who fall this day, I see heaven's gates cast wide open to receive you."

With their eyes turned toward heaven and calm resignation, the little band of Bible-praying, Bible-reading men sang their last psalm to the God of their salvation. Emboldened by greater numbers and better arms, the dragoons attacked at once. The Covenanters were sometimes called wanderers because they wandered about, having no certain dwelling place. David Haxton was with Richard Cameron and wrote before he died: "The rest of us advanced fast on the enemy, a strong body of horse coming hard upon us. Whereupon, when we were joined, our horse fired first and wounded and killed some of them, both on horse and on foot. Our horse advanced to their faces and we fired on each other."

I being foremost, after receiving their fire and finding the horse behind me broken, then rode in amongst them and went out at a side without any wrong or wound. I was pursued by several with whom I fought a good space, sometimes they following me, sometimes I following them. At last, by a treacherous and unfair blow, David Haxton was struck down, and he says they gave us all testimony of being brave and resolute men.

Nine of the Covenanters were slain that day, among them Richard Cameron, the Lion of the Covenant, and his brother Michael, who was always inseparable. Cameron's men, according to the Dragoons' testimony, fought like madmen. Twenty-eight of the King's

Dragoons were killed and only nine Covenanters, and yet the battle was lost.

Two stanzas from a poem on the slaughter of Richard Cameron and the others at Airds Moss, written by Shepherd Ladd, capture the scene:

“When the righteous had fallen and the combat was ended, a chariot of fire through the dark clouds descended. Its drivers were angels on horses of whiteness, and its burning wheels turned on axles of brightness. A seraph unfolded its doors bright and shining, all dazzling like gold of the seventh refining, and the souls that came forth of the great tribulation have mounted the chariot and the steeds of their salvation.”

Richard Cameron was no more than thirty-two years of age; his brother Michael was younger. When they gave their lives for Christ's crown and covenant, six prisoners were taken: William Manuel, John Valiance, John Pollock, David Haxton, John Malcolm, and Archibald Allison. From the severity of his wounds and harsh treatment, William Manuel died as he was carried to Edinburgh. John Valiance died the following day from his wounds. John Pollock was most cruelly treated, yet remained steadfast and cheerful, and was banished as a slave to the American plantations with the marks of his torture still upon him. The other three prisoners were executed. David Haxton was shockingly murdered on the scaffold; John Malcolm and Archibald Allison were hanged. Right before John Malcolm was hanged, he had this to say to the audience.

Let his cause be your cause in weal and woe. O noble cause, O noble work, O noble heaven, O noble Christ that makes it to be heaven, and He is the owner of the work. I lay down my life, not as an evildoer, but as a sufferer for Jesus Christ.

Before Archibald Allison was hanged, he said, “What think you of heaven and glory that is at the back of the cross?” The hope of this makes me look upon pale death as a lovely messenger to me.

I bless the Lord for my lot this day. Friends, give our Lord credit. He is good, but oh, He is good in the day of trial, and He will be sweet company through the ages of eternity. There were many who escaped that day the battle of the Airds Moss, and some even wept

that they did not die that day. But Patrick Walker says those eight who died on the spot with him went ripe and longing for the day of death.

After the dragoons had killed, they dug a hole and pushed the bodies of the dead Covenanters into it. Only after they had taken Richard Cameron and cut off his head and hands did they cut off the head in the hands of Richard Fowler, thinking that he was Michael Cameron. They put the heads and the hands in separate sacks.

On their way to Edinburgh, they stopped at Lanark and saw a lovely young lass named Elizabeth Hope. They asked her whether she would like to buy some calves' heads. She said, "I know not." They emptied the sacks on the ground and took Richard Cameron's head, kicking it as one would kick a soccer ball, until Elizabeth Hope fainted. Upon reaching Edinburgh, the dragoons put the heads upon halberds and cried, "Here are the heads of the traitors, the rebels." One man knew Richard Cameron personally, having been a hearer of Cameron. Cameron was fair complexion and fair hair, and the man said he saw them stick a halberd in the blessed mouth from which many gracious words had previously proceeded. As Robert Murray delivered the head and hands to the council, he said concerning Cameron, "These are the head and hands that lived praying and preaching and died praying and fighting." Richard Cameron died at about the same age as our Savior.

Aftermath: The Father's Response and Haxton's Execution

Before the hangman set the head and hands of the blood-stained Richard Cameron upon the Netherbow Port, a hero saint lay in prison. They took them to the imprisoned saint Alan Cameron, father of Richard and Michael, who had been imprisoned for supporting the field preachers. They thrust them toward him and said, "Do you know them?" When Alan Cameron saw his son's head and hands, he took them and kissed them. "Yes, I know them. They are my sons, my own dear sons. It is the Lord."

"Good is the will of the Lord, who cannot wrong me or mine, but has made goodness and mercy to follow me all the days of my life. Blessed be the name of the Lord." Here was a man broken, battered,

and imprisoned, the father of martyred sons and a martyred daughter. Yet, when he saw his son's head in the hands of the executioners, he could only praise the Lord. Quoting Psalm 23, "Goodness and mercy all my life shall surely follow me, and in God's house forevermore my dwelling place shall be," he showed that he was assured of the faith of his sons and his own faith.

David Haxton was captured. He had been wounded, but lived. Haxton was so hated by the King that eight days after his capture, the King's sentence came down. Here is the sentence passed upon David Haxton for his fellowship and association with Richard Cameron: His body be drawn backward on a hurdle to the Mercat Cross, and a high scaffold erected a little above the cross, where, in the first place, his right hand is to be struck off, and, after some time, his left hand.

Then he is to be hanged up and cut down alive, his bowels taken out, and his heart shown to the people by the hangman; then his heart and his bowels burned in a fire prepared for that purpose on the scaffold. Afterwards, his head is to be cut off and his body divided into four quarters: his head fixed on the Netherbow, one of his quarters, with his hands, affixed to St. Andrews, another quarter at Glasgow, a third at Leith, and a fourth at Burntisland. None is to be presumed to be in mourning for him, or any coffin brought; no person is to be suffered to be on the scaffold with him, save the two baillies, the executioner, and his servants. He is allowed to pray to God Almighty, but not to speak to any of the people. Haxton's and Cameron's heads are to be fixed on higher poles than all the rest.

At Richard Cameron's ordination, the great McWard said, "Here is the head of a servant of Jesus Christ, who shall lose it for his Master's interest, and it shall be in public view of the sun and the moon." And so it was. Richard Cameron's head and his hands, along with David Haxton's, were lifted up above the others who had died for their faith in Jesus Christ. Thus lived and died Richard Cameron, the Lion of the Covenant, who stood for Christ's crown and covenant.

Application: Conviction and Call for Modern Zeal

It is times like these that remind us of our Lord's words in John 16, verses 1–3: “These things have I spoken unto you, that ye should not be offended. They shall put you out of the synagogues: yea, the time cometh, that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service. And these things will they do unto you, because they have not known the Father, nor me.”

All this was done by King Charles I so that he could establish his church. In light of today’s message, we should first be convicted of our own lukewarmness, lack of love, and lack of zeal for Jesus Christ. Second, this message ought to stir us up in light of the times in which we live, that God would raise up Richard Camerons, some David Haxtons, some Donald Cargills, and James Guthries—men who would not only stand against tyranny, totalitarianism, and despotism, but who, in standing against those things, would stand for Christ, His Word, His crown, and His covenant. May God be pleased to give us men like Richard Cameron.

Father, in Thy name we bow to Thee. We thank You and acknowledge Your mercy and grace to us. We are thankful for these men whom Thou hast allowed to live and die for Your honor and glory. Give us holy determination and grace to live for Thee. We do not need to think about dying for You; we need to think about living for You. If we will not live for You, we will not die for You. Give us living grace, and when time comes to die, You will give us dying grace. Give us grace that we may be true witnesses and testimonies for Thee, and exalt Thy crown and Thy covenant. In the name of Jesus Christ we ask, Amen.

CHAPTER 14

Dead Letter Christians

Dead Letter or Word Only Christians

SCRIPTURE READING - 1 Thessalonians 1:1-10 (KJV)

I want to share a message which I preached to our people recently, called "Dead Letter or Word Only Christians." The passage is important, and questions from a good friend have come in the same line and vein as this teaching.

"Paul, and Silvanus, and Timotheus, unto the church of the Thessalonians which is in God the Father and in the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ."

"We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers; Remembering without ceasing your work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, in the sight of God and our Father; Knowing, brethren beloved, your election of God. For our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance; as ye know what manner of men we were among you for your sake. And ye became followers of us, and of

> the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Ghost:"
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> "So that ye were ensamples to all that believe in Macedonia and Achaia. For from you sounded out the word of the Lord not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith to God-ward is spread abroad; so that we need not to speak any thing. For they themselves shew of us what manner of entering in we had unto you, and how ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God; And to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come."

Introduction: The Problem with Christians and the Church

> I have been asked repeatedly in the last number of years what in the world is wrong with Christians. Occasionally, it is asked another way: what in the world is wrong with the church? I do not think anyone would disagree that there are problems—in fact, many problems—in most churches and among most professing Christians. We could use terms like apathetic, indolent, lethargic, sluggish, unconcerned, unprincipled, and unethical. Those would be just a few terms that would characterize Christendom as a whole.

There are exceptions, but applied across the board, these terms would certainly apply. We could probably also add several other terms like unregenerate, unconverted, and unrepentant.

Paul said concerning these Thessalonians in verse 5, “For our gospel came not unto you in word only, but in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance; as ye know what manner of men we were among you for your sake.” He emphasized the fact that the gospel did not come unto them in word only. There are individuals who know only the Word, or have what they would call an experience with the Word only, or what I would designate as dead letter Christians.

The Gospel Not in Word Only

In 1 Thessalonians 1, Paul makes this point, and in 1 John 3 the Apostle John also picks up on word-only Christians. Beginning with verse 16, he says, “Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him? My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth. And hereby we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before him. For if our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things. Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God.”

The interesting thing is that John says, “My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue.” In other words, it cannot be simply word only. Do you realize that the two greatest examples of love are given to us right here? “Hereby perceive we the love of God.” How do we perceive, grasp, and lay hold on the love of God? God did not simply tell us, “I love you.” He gave his only begotten Son. And when the Lord Jesus Christ demonstrated his love, He did not simply say, “I love you.”

Love Demonstrated, Not Just Spoken

He laid down his life on our behalf. Love, according to the Bible, is always demonstrable. It cannot be just simply in word or in tongue. If some of our brethren have needs, we do not just say, "Be ye warmed and filled," and "May the Lord bless you," or "I'll pray for you." If we have whatever they need, we supply that need and take care of it. We demonstrate that we love by actually doing something and taking care of the needs.

Conduct and action reveal the heart. Unhappily, that is not the way it is with most churches today, nor with most professing Christians. Most professing Christians in most churches simply go merrily on their way without the least bit of concern, compassion, or compulsion. Nothing ever bothers them, upsets them, or turns over their apple cart. The answer is that they are simply word-only professors.

The Danger of Religion Without the Holy Ghost

William Booth was the founder of the Salvation Army. He said, "The chief danger that confronts the coming century will be religion without the Holy Ghost, Christianity without Christ, forgiveness without repentance, salvation without regeneration, politics without God, and heaven without hell." The chief danger, he said, would be religion without the Holy Ghost.

What we have done today in Christianity is reduce Christianity to a ritual and a ceremony, and reduce salvation to a sinner's prayer. Millions of individuals who profess to be Christians have prayed a sinner's prayer, but they have never been convicted by the Holy Spirit, converted, or brought to repentance of their sins. They have been led down a primrose path and now think that everything is settled for eternity and their eternal home is secure regardless of how they act and live. The truth is that they have been saved by preachers or by their own decision. They have not been saved by the Lord Jesus Christ because they have not been convicted by the Holy Ghost.

It is like the old drunk stumbling down the street who saw Billy Sunday, a Presbyterian evangelist in the 1930s and a very powerful preacher. He stumbled up to him and said, "Mr. Sunday, Mr. Sunday, don't you recognize me? I'm one of your converts." Billy Sunday said, "Bless God, you must be. You're certainly not one of God's."

Salvation Is of the Lord: Man's Inability

The truth of the matter is this: men cannot regenerate themselves. They cannot repent in and of themselves. Salvation is of the Lord. One of the clearest passages in the Bible is found in Mark chapter 10, where we have the rich young ruler. He came running to Jesus Christ, knelt before Him, and said, "Good Master, what must I do that I may inherit eternal life?"

Our Lord said, "Well, you know the commandments, Do not kill, Do not steal, Honour thy father and thy mother." The young man replied, "All these have I observed from my youth up: what lack I yet?" Our Lord said to him, "Well, if thou wilt be perfect, go and sell

that thou hast, and give to the poor, and come, take up thy cross, and follow me."

In verse 22, the Bible says of the rich young ruler, "And he was sad at that saying, and went away grieved: for he had great possessions."

How many of you sold everything that you had and gave to the poor when you were saved? The answer is not one of you. Have you ever wondered why Jesus Christ told this rich young ruler, "Go and sell everything you have and give to the poor and take up your cross and follow me"? The answer is very simple.

Our Lord had just said, "You know the commandments. Do not steal, do not kill, honour thy father and thy mother." His response was, "All these have I observed from my youth up. What lack I yet?" When Jesus Christ said, "There's one thing you lack. You go and sell everything you have and give to the poor and take up your cross and follow me," He was making application of the law. He was demonstrating that this young man, who thought he had kept the law perfectly, had not even kept the first commandment: "Thou shalt have no other gods before me," for his money was his god. And so he went away grieved.

Look at verse 23: “And Jesus looked round about, and saith unto his disciples, How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God! And the disciples were astonished at his words. But Jesus answereth again, and saith unto them, Children, how hard is it for them that trust in riches to enter into the kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.”

Now watch verse 26: “And they were astonished out of measure, saying among themselves, Who then can be saved?” Note what the question revolves around: salvation. Verse 27 says, “And Jesus looking upon them saith, With men it is impossible, but not with God: for with God all things are possible.”

Our Lord is saying that man cannot save himself. He cannot convict himself, convert himself, or even repent in and of himself. That is why, in 1 Thessalonians 1:5, the Apostle Paul thanks God that when the Word of God came to the Thessalonian Christians, it did

not come in word only, but in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance.

Paul is saying, “I’m so thankful that when you heard the Word of God, it was not simply oratory, nor the wisdom and cunning craftiness of men.” When they heard the Word of God, it came with power, with the Holy Ghost, and with much assurance. The word “power” there is the Greek word dunamis, from which we get our English word “dynamite.” When the gospel came to them, it came with dynamite—the power of the Holy Ghost.

Now, we understand that the Word of God is powerful in and of itself. Hebrews 4:12 says, “For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.” Notice, “For the word of God is quick, and powerful,” and certainly the Word of God is that. But one thing you must remember is that which makes the Word of God quick and powerful: the ministry of the Holy Spirit. Without the ministry of the Holy Spirit, the Word by itself is a dead letter.

The Word and the Spirit: Letter Kills, Spirit Gives Life

Let me show you. In 2 Corinthians 3, beginning with verse 5, the Apostle Paul said, “Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves;” and remember, he was an apostle, but he said, “our sufficiency is of God; Who also hath made us able ministers of the new testament; not of the letter, but of the spirit: for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life.”

So what is he saying? The Word of God by itself kills. It is the Spirit that gives it life. Did you know that our Lord said essentially the same thing in John 6 and verse 63? He said, “It is the spirit that quickeneth; the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life.” So He said, “It is the Spirit that quickeneth.” When our Lord spoke, you must remember, He had the Spirit without measure. Therefore, the words that He spoke were spirit and were life.

God's Word never returns void, and it does indeed accomplish that whereunto He sends it. Isaiah 55:10-11 says, "For as the rain

cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater: So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it."

God is saying that His Word never returns to Him void. But it is important to understand that His Word, whether in the letter or whether in the Spirit, always accomplishes that which He pleases, and it always prospers in that which He sends it. It does indeed accomplish that whereunto He sends it.

The Word's Dual Ministry: Condemnation and Reconciliation

Here is our problem: we tend to think that God's Word is sent only for reconciliation. But that is not true. There is an entire ministry of condemnation. God can send His Word either for condemnation or for reconciliation. In 2 Corinthians 2:14, the Apostle Paul says, "Now thanks be unto God, which always causeth us to triumph in Christ, and maketh manifest the savour of his knowledge by us in every place." In other words, the Word never fails, and it makes manifest the savour of His knowledge in every place.

The word "savour" refers to a smell. It is a sweet-smelling savour. Paul continues: "For we are unto God a sweet savour of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish: To the one we are the savour of death unto death; and to the other the savour of life unto life. And who is sufficient for these things?"

The Word of God can go for condemnation as well as reconciliation. In fact, 2 Corinthians 3 speaks of the Old Covenant as a ministry of condemnation, because the Old Covenant could not really truly redeem or give life. Therefore it was called a ministry of condemnation. It could not give life, so it was called a ministry of condemnation. Now, it is true that anyone who hears the Word of God is responsible to heed the Word of God.

You're responsible to apply it. Our Lord said, "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear." You have a responsibility, and you will be judged

by the word that you hear. Our Lord said in John 12 and verse 48, "He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day." Whether you hear the word of God and are converted, or hear the word of God and are condemned, it is going to be the word of God that judges you.

Why did I call this message "Dead Letter or Word Only Christians"? Because word only professors are resting in their decisions, in something other than the power of God in salvation. Those resting in their decision, their church membership, their baptism, and their good deeds are going to be in for a real rude awakening on Judgment Day.

Those who trust in such things are deceived. They are word only professors. J.H. Merle d'Aubigné, a Frenchman who was a historian and a godly man, wrote a whole set on the history of the Reformation. If you do nothing but get his two volumes on the history of the Reformation in England, I would encourage you to do so. They are very fine works, two volumes that you cannot possibly put down.

D'Aubigné said this in the history of the Reformation in England: "To believe in the power of man in the work of regeneration is the great heresy of Rome. And from that error has come the ruin of the church. Conversion proceeds from the grace of God alone. And the system which ascribes it partly to man and partly to God is worse than Pelagianism."

Pelagius taught that man comes into the world as his own Adam, with absolute free will, sinless, and with a blank tablet, so to speak. He denied total depravity; he denied everything. So, what is d'Aubigné talking about? He says, "Conversion proceeds from the grace of God alone, and the system which ascribes it partly to man and partly to God is worse than Pelagianism."

You've heard preachers say, "God has done his part, now you need to do your part." That's synergism. That is semi-Pelagianism. That is not salvation. Many people are trusting in their part and their decision. Charles Hodge, one of the greatest American theologians, who died in 1878, pointed out the danger of synergism and

semi-Pelagianism: "No more soul-destroying doctrine could well be devised than the doctrine that sinners can regenerate themselves and repent and believe just whenever they please."

"As it is a truth both of scripture and of experience, that the unrenewed man can do nothing of himself to secure his salvation, it is essential that he should be brought to the practical conviction of that truth. When thus convicted, and not before, he seeks help from the only source from which it can be obtained." If a man does not understand his inability—if he does not understand 1 Corinthians 2:14, "the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned"—and if he does not understand Romans 8:8, "so then they that are in the flesh cannot please God," he will never seek help from the Lord Jesus Christ. Now you can understand why the Apostle Paul said, "For our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance."

The gospel necessarily came with words. There is no interpretation of Scripture, preaching of the gospel, or hearing without words and articulate sounds. But if that is all you have, it is a dead letter. Paul explains that his testimony was in Christ and in Christ alone: "And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified."

"And I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling. And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power: That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God." When Paul came to preach, it was not wonderful oratory that overwhelmed his hearers, nor heart-wrenching illustrations, emotional deliveries, enticing and exciting words, or an attempt to fool, deceive, and make them decide. His preaching was in the power of God and in the Holy Ghost, so that their faith would stand in the power of God and not in man.

I preached for over 50 years, and I can assure you that if all a preacher wants is decisions, he can get them. I can give you some of

the most heart-wrenching stories you have ever heard in your life. I can make you cry. I can make you laugh. I can do whatever I need to do to make you come to Christ with a decision.

But all it is doing is making it stand in the wisdom of man and not in the power of God. It is useless, worthless, and fruitless. That is exactly what the Apostle Paul is saying. So he said to these Thessalonians, “The Word of God came to you. The gospel came to you, not in word only, but in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance.”

The pressing questions we need to ask are these: How can you be sure that you are not a word-only Christian, or a dead-letter professor? Asked another way, how can you be absolutely certain that you are a genuine Christian? Or, what was it in these Thessalonian Christians that set them apart so that they knew absolutely that they were God’s elect?

The Marks of Genuine Conversion: Work of Faith, Labour of Love, Patience of Hope

Turn back to 1 Thessalonians chapter 1 and look at verse 4. Notice what the Apostle Paul says: “Knowing, brethren beloved, your election of God.” He said, “You know you’re God’s elect. I know you are God’s elect.” How did Paul know that they were God’s elect? He did not climb up into heaven and look at the Lamb’s book of life. Neither could these Thessalonians. How did they know that they were God’s elect? Because in verse 5 he said, “For our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance.” They knew they were God’s elect because of what God had done in them, and for them, and through them. So here is my question: What is there in your life that can only be there because of the supernatural work of the Holy Spirit? What is there in your life that can be there only because of the supernatural work of the Holy Spirit? Let us see what set these Thessalonian Christians apart, so that they knew for sure that they were God’s elect.

A Work of Faith

If you look in verse 3, the Apostle Paul gives us three areas, three things that set these Thessalonian Christians apart: "Remembering

without ceasing your work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, in the sight of God and our Father."

John Calvin said of this verse, "The statement should be explained to mean that Paul remembers their patience in hoping for the coming of Christ. From this we may gather a brief definition of true Christianity: that it is a faith that is lively and full of vigor, so that it spares no labor when assistance is to be given to one's neighbors; but on the contrary, all the pious employ themselves diligently in offices of love, and lay out their efforts in them, so that, intent upon the hope of the manifestation of Christ, they despise everything else, and armed with patience, they rise superior to the wearisomeness of the length of time, as well as to all the temptations of the world."

Calvin said that verse 3 should be a brief definition of true Christianity: their work of faith, their labour of love, and their patience of hope. First, a work of faith. Notice what Paul says: "Remembering without ceasing your work of faith." It is interesting that the Apostle Paul speaks of "your work of faith."

Obviously, he does not contradict himself. He knows that he wrote in Ephesians 2:8-9, "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast." If faith is God's gift, and it is, how can he say, "Remembering without ceasing your work of faith"? How can it be ascribed as a work of faith in the believers in this passage?

Philippians 2:12 says, “Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence.” Then comes this amazing statement: “Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.” Why does Paul tell the Philippians to work out their own salvation with fear and trembling? Verse 13 answers: “For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.”

Here is what Paul is saying in Philippians 2 and in 1 Thessalonians 1:3: God worked it in you; it is your responsibility to work it out. We are to exercise it, and it is called a work. This does not mean that we are earning it or meriting it. It has already been given to us. It is a gift. Faith is His gift. When I exercise that faith, it

is called my work because it is my responsibility. God works it in; it is my responsibility to work it out.

When God gives me faith, that is His gift, and when I believe in Him, I am exercising the gift He gave me. God may give the gift of faith, but He is not going to believe for you. That is your responsibility. You must work out that faith. God may give you the gift of repentance, and repentance is God's gift, but God is not going to turn from sin for you. That is your responsibility. God works it in; you must work it out.

All of the results, evidences, and manifestations of God's gift of faith are always seen in terms of biblical obedience. Ephesians 2:8-9 says, "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast." But verse 10 continues: "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them." Real saving faith always has biblical works.

James tells us the same thing: "What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? can faith save him?" Or can that kind of faith save him? "If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, And one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit? Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone. Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works."

God may be able to see our faith, but men cannot. The only way that we can demonstrate our faith is by biblical obedience and biblical works. Biblical works evidence our faith; we are biblically obedient.

We must use Scripture to interpret Scripture. In 1 Thessalonians 1:3, Paul says, "Remembering without ceasing your work of faith." How does he describe their work of faith? In verse 9: "For they themselves shew of us what manner of entering in we had unto you, and how ye turned to God from idols." God is not going to turn from idols for you. He is not going to turn from sin for you, and He is not

going to believe for you. It is called their work of faith because they turned with their whole heart.

It was not a half-baked turn, but one that was real, genuine, and true. They forsook their idols, their false gods, and their sins; in that forsaking, it is called a work of faith. If we believe, confess, and acknowledge that our God is absolutely sovereign, ultimate, supreme, and absolute, then we also acknowledge that we must turn from anything and everything else and worship and serve Him alone, because He alone deserves our worship, honor, and adoration.

We have to submit to Him totally and completely. So when the Apostle Paul says, "Remembering without ceasing your work of faith," he explains that work of faith: they turned from idols to the one true and living God. One thing that set these Thessalonians apart was that they actually turned from idolatry and from sin. But there was another thing. In verse 3 he says, "Remembering without ceasing your work of faith, and labour of love." They not only had a work of faith; they also had a labour of love. How do you explain the labour of love? Verse 9 explains it: "For they themselves shew of us what manner of entering in we had unto you, and how ye turned to God from idols"—here is their labour of love—"to serve the living and true God."

How do you serve the living and true God? You could answer, "We could serve him by prayer, worship, tithes and offerings, or any number of ways." That is true. Yet it is our love that motivates us to serve Him. Our fear of Him holds Him in reverential awe and honor, but our love drives us. We can serve Him by prayer, worship, and giving; yes, that is true.

Many people profess to serve God when in reality they do not serve God; they end up serving themselves. But in reality, God does not need serving, because God does not need anything. God is already absolutely perfect and absolutely blessed. The only thing we can give Him is what He has already given us.

So, that brings me back to this question: How do we serve Him? And what really counts as a labour of love? In 1 Thessalonians 1:3, he says, "Remembering without ceasing your work of faith and labour of love." Hebrews 6:10 shows us what that labour of love is: "For God

is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love, which ye have shewed toward his name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister." We minister to God and demonstrate a labour of love when we minister to each other and love each other as He commands us.

I know that there are some Christians who are unlovely and hard to get along with. The Scripture says, "As much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men." But if someone is a real, genuine saint of God, regardless of how stubborn and hard-headed they are, and regardless of how lovable they are, we are still required to love them and minister to them.

Look at Matthew 25, the passage concerning the sheep and the goats. Our Lord says, "And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left. Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.

"For I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me. Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, and fed thee? or thirsty, and gave thee drink? When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? or naked, and clothed thee? Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee? And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me."

"Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels: For I was an hungred, and ye gave me no meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me not in: naked, and ye clothed me not: sick, and in prison, and ye visited me not. Then shall they also answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, or athirst, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto thee?" In other words, "Lord, if we had seen you, surely we would have done this to you." "Then shall he answer them, saying, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me. And these shall go

away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal."

Is it not obvious that our labour in love and the way we serve God is by serving each other and all the saints of God? Whatever we do to each other, we do to our Lord. Whatever we do not do to each other, we do not do unto the Lord.

The fear of God means that we hold Him in reverence and awe, but love is what is to motivate us and to drive us. "For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision; but faith which worketh by love." And, "For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another." John said, "By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God, and keep his commandments." So if we are going to serve God, it is by serving each other.

This was the third thing that set these Thessalonian Christians apart and let us know that they were genuinely saved. He said, "Remembering without ceasing your work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, in the sight of God and our Father." The patience of hope, first of all, is in the Lord Jesus Christ. It is found only in Him, and it is in the sight of God and our Father.

Now, let's talk about patience just for a moment, especially patience of hope. We may have patience of hope in trials and tribulations and persecutions. One of my favorite phrases in the Bible is this: "And it came to pass." Whenever you're in a test, trial, tribulation, or persecution, stop and think, "It came to pass." It didn't come to stay, thank God. It came to pass, and it will pass. It will go away if you will be patient and do what is right.

We can talk about patience in trials, tests, and tribulations, but if you look in verse 10, the Apostle Paul interprets this patience of hope: "And to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come." When we wait patiently in hope, it means that we are hopefully and patiently waiting for the accomplishment of God's promises and God's purpose.

Counterfeit hopes give up, give in, quit, fail, and falter. Christian hope never fails and never falters. Why? Because of 1 Timothy chapter 1 and verse 1: “Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the commandment of God our Saviour, and Lord Jesus Christ, which is our hope.” Jesus Christ is our hope. I want that to sink in. Albert Barnes says, “It is a hope which we have for the merits of the Redeemer and which we are permitted to cherish before God.”

“That is in His very presence. When we think of God, when we reflect that we must soon stand before Him, we are permitted to cherish this hope. It is a hope which will be found to be genuine even in the presence of a holy, heart-searching God. This does not mean that it had been merely professed before God, but that it was a hope which they might dare to entertain in the presence of God, which could bear the scrutiny of His holy eye.”

What is he saying? Jesus Christ is my hope. When I stand before God in judgment, if God in His piercing holiness asks me, “Why should I let you into my eternal home?” I can say, “Because of my hope, and my hope is nothing else and no one else than Jesus Christ and Jesus Christ alone.” I am permitted to cherish this hope in the very presence of God Himself: “Paul, an apostle, by the commandment of God our Saviour, and Lord Jesus Christ, which is our hope.”

Can you imagine standing before God? Wait till you get older; it will not take long, and you will be able to imagine it. You will stand before God. I trust that your hope will be Jesus Christ and Jesus Christ alone.

Waiting for his Son from heaven does not mean that we sit idly by, twiddling our thumbs and whiling away the time. No. These Thessalonian Christians were not inactive. They had become followers of the apostles and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Ghost. It was not easy for them, yet they followed the apostles and the Lord. They were persecuted, but they had the joy of the Holy Spirit.

They were ensamples to all that believe in Macedonia and Achaia. From them sounded out the word of the Lord, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place; their faith to God-ward was

spread abroad, so that Paul and his companions did not need to speak anything. Can you imagine that? Paul said, “When we came into that entire area, we didn't even have to preach. You had spread the Word.” Everyone knew their holiness, godliness, and obedience. They were examples to everyone in Macedonia and Achaia. Their faith was active, their love was laboring, and their hope was patient, enabling them to endure, persevere, and remain faithful to the end.

So, let me return to the original questions: What's wrong with Christians? What's wrong with the church? The answer is that we have too many dead-letter Christians, too many word-only professors. We have church members who have never been regenerated, convicted, converted, or brought to repentance. They have never turned to God from their idols or from their sins. Moreover, they are not interested in the Word of God; they are interested in entertainment and amusement.

Self-Examination: Are You a Dead Letter Professor?

I saw an ad in the shopper in Coffee County, Douglas, Georgia. I may not be getting the ad exactly right, but here it is: “We're starting a new church. We're putting the fun back in Christianity. Parties every month, singing and dancing. Call us if you want to join us.” Fun in Christianity? Where is the offense of the gospel? Where is the preaching of the Word of God?

The truth of the matter is this: the average professing Christian knows nothing of humility, sacrifice, lowliness, godliness, and holiness—and does not want them. They have itching ears, wanting pastors to scratch and tickle them and entertain them. We have come to the place where Ezekiel was. Ezekiel was a priest turned prophet whom God used to preach to people already in Babylon. They came to him, and God said in Ezekiel 33:32, “Lo, thou art unto them as a very lovely song of one that hath a pleasant voice, and can play well on an instrument: for they hear thy words, but they do them not.” They were entertained; they did not care what he preached or taught.

They were dead letter professors. You have to examine yourselves and ask: Is there really, genuinely, a work of God in my life? Is there something in my life that could not possibly be there because of me,

something that has to be there because of the work of God? Have I really had a work of faith? Have I really turned to God from idols and from sin?

Do I have a labour of love? Am I interested in serving the saints and being a servant? Do I have a real patience of hope? Can I cherish Jesus Christ and His great salvation now and in the very presence of God? Can you say with the Apostle Paul, in 2 Timothy 1:12, “For the which cause I also suffer these things: nevertheless I am not ashamed: for I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day”? Paul had a genuine hope. These Thessalonians had a genuine hope. Do you?

Conclusion: Only the Holy Spirit Authenticates

Are you a dead letter or word-only professor? Or have you been powerfully convicted and converted by the Holy Spirit? Look in 1 Corinthians chapter 12 and verse 3. The Apostle Paul says, "Wherefore I give you to understand, that no man speaking by the Spirit of God calleth Jesus accursed: and that no man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost."

Anyone who curses the Lord Jesus Christ is certainly not speaking in the Holy Ghost. No man can say that Jesus is Lord but by the Holy Ghost. I could walk out on the street tonight, and anyone who has a tongue and the ability to say words could say, "Jesus is Lord." He could mouth those words, but that does not make him saved.

The only way a man can savingly say that Jesus Christ is Lord is by the Holy Ghost. Man may imitate, but only the Holy Spirit can authenticate. Man may take his words and his tongue and pray the sinner's prayer and even say, "Jesus is Lord." But if the word has not come to him in power and in the Holy Ghost, he is not saved. He is a word-only or dead-letter professor. That's all.

The truth is, if God does not save us, we are not saved, no matter what we do or where we go. Salvation is of the Lord. Paul said of these Thessalonians, "For our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance." When God saves you, you will have the much assurance.

Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we bow before Thee tonight. We thank You for Your Word and for Your truth. We pray, Lord, that You would indeed be pleased to send forth these words with power and in the Holy Spirit. Open hearts and penetrate them by Thy grace and by Thy mercy, and help us, Lord, to rely solely and completely upon Jesus Christ, who is our Lord. We thank You for Your grace and Your mercy. In Christ's name, Amen.

CHAPTER 15

Prerequisites For Loving The Lord

Introduction: The Priority of Loving the Lord

In Psalm 18 and Psalm 116, David speaks of loving the Lord. In Psalm 18, verse 1, David says, “I will love thee, O Lord, my strength.” Then, in Psalm 116, verse 1, David said, “I love the Lord because he had heard my voice and my supplications.” I want to bring a message today entitled “Prerequisites for Loving the Lord.” I had several messages prepared to preach today and was really at a quandary as to which one to preach. Eventually, I am going to preach all of them. But I got to thinking that this message actually has priority over all the others. If we can understand this one little, simple message, I think it will change your life.

Love Defined as Obedience

So, Psalm 18, verse 1: David said, “I will love thee, O Lord, my strength.” I have preached many times on loving the Lord and have told you in times past what it means to love the Lord. I have pointed out how love, according to the Bible, is obedience. Does it matter if

you look in the Old Testament? Does it matter if you look in the New Testament? All throughout the Bible, love is equated with obedience. We are talking about the fact that love is obedience.

Let me quote four short passages for you. I am not going to ask you to turn to these because I have given them to you in times past, but I want you to have this in your mind simply by way of remembrance.

In John 14, verse 21, our Lord said, “He that hath my commandments and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me. And he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him and will manifest myself unto him.” Our Lord said, “He that hath my commandments and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me.” In John 14, verse 24, He said, “He that keepeth not my sayings, loveth me not.” Very obvious.

Then, in 1 John 5, verse 3, the Bible says, “For this is the love of God that we keep his commandments and his commandments are not grievous.” And then, in 1 John chapter 2, verses 3 and 4, the word of God says, “And hereby we do know that we know him. If we keep his commandments, he that says I know him and keepeth not his commandments is a liar.”

And the truth is not in him. I hope some of you will remember that recently, within the last six months anyhow, I brought a message on how to love the Lord with all of your heart. It is certainly not my intent to re-preach that message or any other messages previously preached on this subject. However, I do believe that they bear repeating, and probably bear repeating very often, simply because we are so absolutely forgetful and so easily distracted from our central purpose and calling in life. You say, “Well, what is our central purpose and calling in life?” The answer is this: to glorify God and to enjoy him forever.

The Central Purpose: Glorifying God by Loving Him

That is the whole duty of man. One of the ways that we glorify God is by learning to love him and enjoy him, and understanding that he is indeed worthy to be loved. The interesting thing is this: if we do not love the Lord now in time and in history, what makes us think we are

going to love him all of a sudden in eternity? If we do not enjoy being in his presence now in time and in history, what makes you think we are going to enjoy being in his presence in eternity? It may surprise you, as you read through the Bible, to find out not only how many commands there are to love the Lord, but how many commands there are to the saints of God to love the Lord.

Commands to Love the Lord

Let me give you just a sampling. Deuteronomy 6:5 says, “And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, with all thy soul and all thy might.” “And thou shalt”—that is, it is a command. Deuteronomy 30:6 says, “And the Lord thy God will circumcise thine heart and the heart of thy seed to love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, with all thy soul, that thou mayest live.” He would circumcise our hearts so that we may love the Lord with all of our hearts. Deuteronomy 30:16 continues, “Deuteronomy 30 verse 16.”

Deuteronomy 30:16 says, “In that I command thee this day to love the Lord thy God, to walk in His ways, to keep His commandments and His statutes and His judgments, that thou mayest live and multiply, that the Lord, thy God shall bless thee in the land, whither thou goest to possess it.” In Joshua 23:11, he said, “Take good heed unto yourselves that you love the Lord, your God.”

Psalm 31:23 says, “Oh, love the Lord, all you, his saints for the Lord preserved the faithful and plentifully rewarded the proud doer.” So he cries, “Oh, love the Lord, all ye his saints.” Psalm 97:10 says, “Ye that love the Lord hate evil. He preserved the souls of his saints. He delivered them out of the hand of the wicked.” All of these passages, then, are not only commanding us to love the Lord, but many of them are already addressed to the people of God.

The Danger of Falling into Sin

Now let me tell you why I am preaching this message. Recently, I have heard about some, and I know firsthand about some other Christians, who have fallen headlong into sin, disobedience, and rebellion. I have to confess that a few of those I know about and have heard about absolutely shocked me. The reason I was shocked is because I assumed and believed that they were far more grounded in

the Word of God and had more integrity and more character than they obviously did have.

We live in a day and time where sin is rampant, where the easiest and most natural thing for anybody to do is to sin. Period. Our flesh longs for it. The world offers it to us, and it is there. When I got to thinking about these professing believers who have fallen so far, I thought of Galatians 6:1: “Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, you who are spiritual restore such an one in the spirit of meekness, considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted.” Some of these individuals I could get to; some of them I could not get to. But what was really emphasized in my own mind was this: “Considering thyself. Lest thou also be tempted.” I understand that, if it were not for the grace of God, it could have been me who had fallen, and not them.

The truth of the matter is this: it is very easy for you and me to fall because we are sinners, and by nature we love sin. But I do not want to fall. I do not want to sin against our sovereign, gracious Lord. So the question has to be, How do I fortify myself so that I will not fall? How do I fortify myself so that I do not sin against God?

You remember what God said in Jeremiah 44:4: “Oh, do not that abominable thing which I hate.” God commands us not to sin. Sin is that abominable thing which He hates. God says, just do not do it. John the Apostle wrote in 1 John 2:1, “My little children, these things I write unto you that you sin not.” He went on to say, “If any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.” But he said he was writing these things that we sin not. In other words, if it is a heresy that we can be sinlessly perfect, and it is, it is an equal heresy that we have to sin, because we do not. John said, “My little children, these things I write on you that you sin not.”

David said in Psalm 119:9–11, “Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way by taking heed thereto according to thy word. With my whole heart have I sought thee. O let me not wander from thy commandments. Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee.”

The Primary Fortification: Loving the Lord

So how do I fortify myself that I will not do that abominable thing which He hates? There are a number of answers. We can fortify ourselves with Scripture. We cannot forsake the assembling of ourselves together. We can have constant and continual prayer, fellowship with the saints, and the giving and receiving of admonitions and rebukes. I am sure there are many answers. However, I want to concentrate on the primary, or main, answer. If we follow the primary answer, all these other things will fall into place. So what is the primary or main answer?

A Holy Determination

How do we fortify ourselves so that we do not sin against the Lord? The answer is to love Him the way He deserves to be loved. He deserves to be loved with all of our heart, with all of our mind, with all of our soul, with everything that we are. He deserves our devotion, our honor, our prayer, and our praise. What is the one thing that will include all of these other answers as to how not to sin against our God?

If you look in Psalm 18:1, first of all, there must be a holy determination. David says, "I will love thee, O Lord, my strength." David is expressing a truth that is needed in each of our lives: the determination to love the Lord.

First Prerequisite: A Holy Determination (Psalm 18:1)

Note carefully what David says. He did not say, "I want to love the Lord." He did not say, "I hope to love the Lord." David said, "I will love the Lord." Here is a dedicated determination to love the Lord. There are no maybes, no doubts, and no questions. He is determined to love the Lord. He has made a verbal and volitional commitment by saying, "I will love thee, O Lord."

The Hebrew word for love is rakham, which means to love, to love deeply, and to have tender feelings for. David is saying, "I am determined to love the Lord the way He deserves to be loved." It is a holy determination. Anything that involves our Lord has to be holy, for He is holy. Revelation 15:4 says, "Who shall not fear the Lord,

and glorify thy name? for thou only art holy." Whatever we do in reference to our God, it has to be holy.

We understand that our love is a reflection of His love. We cannot love Him first; He loved us first. "We love him, because he first loved us" (1 John 4:19). Therefore, we are to love Him. But our Lord said in John 15:5, "Without me ye can do nothing." Is loving the Lord something? Surely it is. But you cannot do it without Christ, for without Him we can do nothing.

David said, “I will love Thee, O Lord, my strength. I will.” We must remember and constantly rehearse this truth in our minds: love is an act of the will. This is true in our relationship with God and with others. When God commands us to love, He commands our will.

It is true that we must have understanding, and emotions are often involved. However, emotions cannot be commanded. I could not look at Rod and say, “I command you to be happy right now.” He could feign a smile, but that would not mean he was happy. I could say, “I command you to be miserable,” but that would not make him miserable. You cannot command emotions. But if he were obedient, I could say, “I command you to get up and go get me a glass of water.”

That is commanding his will, and whether he feels like it or not is immaterial. He could obey that command. Love primarily is an act of the will. It is true that emotions are oftentimes involved, but emotions are always to follow and never to lead.

With the truth firmly in our minds that God loved us first and that God commands our wills, consider this question: Does God command husbands to love their wives? Yes. In Ephesians 5:25, “Husbands, love your wives.” Plain and simple. Does God command us to love our neighbors? He does. In Leviticus 19:18, He said, “Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.” In James 2:8, He said, “If ye fulfil the royal law according to the scripture, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself, ye do well.” God has commanded husbands to love their wives. He has commanded us to love our neighbors. He has commanded us to love Him, as all those verses showed us: “O love the Lord, all ye his saints.”

In fact, five times in the book of Deuteronomy alone, God commands us to love Him. God is not commanding feelings, sentiments, abstract concepts, or ethereal desires, because those things cannot be commanded. What He is commanding is our wills. God said, “Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it.” I love my wife because I choose to love my wife. I love my neighbor because I choose to love my neighbor. I love my God because I choose to love Him, since He has worked in my heart. Love is an act of the will. It is a choice. It is a determination.

Are there emotions attached to that love? Surely there are. She makes me happy, pleases me, satisfies me, and I wish to be around her. I like to take her with me, and I refuse to forsake her.

There are plenty of other women, many of them beautiful, but I choose not to love them or to be with them. I choose to be with my wife, and I choose to love her. My determination to love my wife has a positive and a negative connotation. Positively, I love her, choose her, and want her. Negatively, I do not love or want other women. Love has both a positive and a negative aspect.

I choose to love the brethren. I choose to love my neighbor as myself. I choose to love those that the Father has given to me. When He tells me to love my neighbor as myself, He is commanding my will. I may have affections toward some of my neighbors, emotions toward some of them; I may like some and dislike others. That is immaterial. I choose deliberately to love them. Whatever emotions I have are the effects and results of my love, but I choose to love.

If I love the brethren, what does that mean? It means I choose to be with them. I would rather be with God's people than with anybody else. Some have said, “I would rather be with believers than with my own family,” meaning that their own family is not believers. Certainly I understand that. But when I say that I choose and will to love my neighbor as myself, it means I am going to protect my brethren, promote them, and seek to please them. It means I am never, ever going to betray them to the enemies of God. Do you love your brother if you betray him? Do you love your neighbor if you betray him? Do you love your wife if you betray her? Do you love your God if you betray Him?

In Psalm 139, David speaks concerning the enemies of God: “Surely thou wilt slay the wicked, O God. Depart from me, therefore, you bloody men. For they speak against thee wickedly, and thine enemies take thy name in vain.” Then he says, “Do not I hate them, O Lord, that hate thee? And am not I grieved with those that rise up against thee? I hate them with perfect hatred. I count them mine enemies.” To show that this is a perfectly biblical attitude, he continues: “Search me, O God, and know my heart. Try me and know my thoughts. And see if there be any wicked way in me. And lead me in the way everlasting.”

If I love the brethren, I am not going to betray them or despise them. I am not going to do anything that would lead me to turn them over to the enemies of God's people. There is a positive and a negative connotation to love. It is true with my wife, my brethren, and my neighbors, but it is also true with our God.

If I have a holy determination to love the Lord, I must understand that I have chosen Him as my Lord and Savior only by His grace, but I have still chosen Him. He worked in me, He worked through me, He drew me to Himself, and I willed to come to Him because He loosed my will from the bondage of sin and renewed my will that I might come to Him and choose Him. He enabled me to do that.

Therefore, when I say, “I love the Lord,” I am expressing a holy determination to bring my life into conformity to the Word of God. I am confessing a holy determination to submit to Him, honor Him, worship Him, and praise Him and Him alone. But when I say, “I will love the Lord,” there is not only a positive meaning; there is also a negative one. I am also saying that I reject and spurn anything and everything contrary to Him.

I must hate, despise, and reject all sin, no matter how appealing it is to my flesh. I must love His Word and His will above all my fleshly desires and fleshly lust. A holy determination of the Lord enables us to defeat sin, Satan, and the world. We know that sin, Satan, and the world are in opposition to God. John wrote in 1 John 2:15–17: "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man loved the world, the love of the father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of

life is not of the father, but of the world. And the world passeth away in the lust thereof, but he that doeth the will of God abideth forever."

Notice what he said: "If any man loved the world, the love of the Father is not in him." So if I say, "I will love thee, O Lord," positively, I am saying, I will obey You, honor You, worship You, and You alone. Negatively, I am saying, I am turning my back on sin, the world, and Satan. I want nothing to do with him.

Here is the truth: We must will and choose the love of the Lord not only daily, but sometimes hourly, and in times of intense temptation and testing, sometimes minute by minute. I must constantly and continually will to love the Lord and refuse sin, Satan, and the world. Loving the Lord and choosing to love the Lord is a lifestyle. As I fight to maintain my integrity, character, and love for my wife in a world filled with fornication and adultery, likewise I must fight to maintain my determination, character, and integrity to love the Lord in the face of a world of sin and wickedness.

The Intensity of Determination (Psalm 73:25)

Psalm 73 shows how intense this holy determination should be. David says, “Whom have I in heaven but thee? And there is none upon earth that I desire besides thee. My flesh and my heart faileth, but God is a strength of my life, of the strength of my heart and my portion forever.” David repeats, “Whom have I in heaven but Thee. And there is none upon earth that I desire besides Thee.” David said, “Lord, I have come to the place that I want You. I want You in eternity? Yes. But I want You in time and history now.” “I will love thee, O Lord, my strength.” There is a holy determination to love the Lord. As you have to fight for purity in your life, you have to fight to keep your love burning brightly to the Lord, because sin and the world and Satan will do everything to destroy that love.

Second Prerequisite: A Holy Delineation (Psalm 116:1)

There must be a holy determination. There must also be a holy delineation. David said in Psalm 116:1, “I love the Lord because. He had heard my voice and my supplication.” Once David says, “I love the Lord because,” he begins to delineate why exactly he loves the

Lord. He does the same thing in Psalm 18. He said, “I will love thee, O Lord, my strength. The Lord is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer, my God, my strength and whom I will trust, my buckler and the horn of my salvation and my high tower.” What David is doing in Psalm 18 is proclaiming his love for the Lord.

David had just been given a tremendous victory over King Saul and all of his enemies, and he was proclaiming his love for the Lord. He particularly calls God his strength, his rock, his fortress, his deliverer, his strength, his trust, his buckler, and the horn of his salvation. David had been delivered from his mortal enemies, and, for all practical purposes, he was saying, “Lord, You are the one that I am going to love for Your deliverance.”

We're not in a time of war yet in this country. I think it may be close. We're in a time of war in plenty of other places. We need God as our strength, our horn, our fortress, our rock, and our refuge. But do you realize how many times God daily delivers us even from our mortal enemies, while we are totally and completely oblivious to that deliverance? God does indeed withhold the wicked. He overthrows their schemes, foils their plans, and causes them to fall into the pit which they have dug for the righteous.

Right now, we don't know of anybody seeking to kill us as Saul was seeking to kill David. But the truth is, God still delivers us. According to Proverbs 18:10, the name of the Lord is a strong tower; the righteous runneth into it, and is safe. David lists some things in Psalm 18 as reasons why he loves the Lord. But when you get to Psalm 116, he delineates things that are even more practical, things that you and I can understand to a greater degree. We need to keep these reasons fresh in our minds and rehearse them daily, yea, hourly if need be.

Although there are a number of reasons to love the Lord, we must understand that there is one main reason: the excellency of His nature, the majesty of His person, the greatness of His throne, the purity of His attributes, the holiness of His character, and the magnanimous mercy He has shown toward us in sending His only begotten Son for our salvation.

In other words, we must think first and foremost of God Himself. The very fact that He is God is reason enough to love Him. If God never did anything for any of us, the very fact that He is God would be sufficient reason to love Him. We must learn to focus first and foremost upon His person before we focus upon His provisions.

The disciples came to our Lord and said, John told his disciples to pray; teach us to pray. Our Lord said, fine, here's how you pray: “Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done in earth as in heaven. Give us this day, our daily bread and forgive us our sins as we forgive everyone who's indebted to us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory forever and amen.” What did our Lord just teach us?

We are to focus first and foremost upon God: “Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done.” Only after we focus on Him do we come to the provisions: “Give us this day our daily bread. Forgive us for our sins.” There is nothing wicked or wrong about being thankful and recognizing the blessings the Father has given us. The benefits He has bestowed upon us certainly merit our praise and thanksgiving. However, we are to focus more upon the Giver than the gifts. It is the Giver who makes the gifts beneficial.

The increase of our love and filial obedience is in proportion to the increased sense we have of our obligation to Him. We must love God for His person. We must also love Him for the benefits He has bestowed upon us. The reason He bestowed those benefits is because God is love, and love should beget love.

David gives us a reason for loving the Lord in Psalm 116: “I love the Lord because he has heard my voice and my supplications, because he’s inclined his ear unto me. Therefore will I call upon him as long as I live.” David loved the Lord because He heard his prayer and supplication and answered him. He took care of him, supplied his needs, and delivered him. Because God had inclined His ear unto him, David would call upon Him as long as he lived.

Once God answers our prayer, that is a good reason not only to keep praying, but to keep loving Him who answered our prayer. It is

the goodness of God that He hears and answers prayer. He said, “Call unto me and I will show thee great and mighty things which thou knowest not.” Our Lord said, “Whatsoever you shall ask in my name, that will I do that the Father may be glorified in the Son.”

Has God ever answered any of your prayers? Have things ever worked out for you when you prayed and asked about them? Of course He has, and He worked them out for you. That is one reason you should love the Lord, and one reason you should continue praying.

Secondly, God is also to be loved for His providential deliverance. Look in verses 3 through 6. David said, “The sorrows of death compass me, and the pains of hell got hold upon me; and I found trouble and sorrow. Then called I upon the name of the Lord; O Lord, I beseech thee, deliver my soul. Gracious is the Lord, and righteous; yea, our God is merciful. The Lord preserveth the simple.” “I was brought low, and he helped me.” So David once again is praising the Lord for His marvelous deliverance.

How many times does God deliver us and we do not even realize that He has delivered us? I know I have quoted this passage many times, but I try to quote it every day. The reason you are sitting here in church this morning is that you did not die last night.

Lamentations 2:22-23 says, “It is of the Lord’s mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. They are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness.” It would be extremely wise for us to develop the habit, every morning when we open our eyes, before we ever get out of bed, of thanking the Lord for those compassions, tender mercies, loving-kindnesses, and His faithfulness that allowed us to live through the night, and asking Him to continue them through the day. When we go to bed at night, we should again acknowledge that it is only because of His grace, mercy, compassion, loving-kindness, and faithfulness that we were allowed to live through the day, asking Him to extend those mercies and compassions through the night.

This will tend to make us conscious that we are wholly, totally, and completely dependent upon Him. If God did not sovereignly and graciously provide these mercies, compassions, and

loving-kindnesses daily, we would not make it through one night or one day. David said, “Our Lord is merciful. He preserved the simple. I was brought low, and He helped me.” Sometimes we are arrogant, proud, and haughty, and God has to humble us and bring us low so that He may help us. God resisted the proud, but He giveth grace to the humble. David is thanking the Lord for this deliverance.

Thirdly, David delineates the bountiful provisions of God as a reason to love Him and walk before Him while He lives. Look at Psalm 116, verses 7 through 9. David said, “Return unto thy rest, O my soul, for the Lord hath dealt bountifully with thee. For that has delivered my soul from death, mine eyes from tears and my feet from falling. I will walk before the Lord in the land of the living.” Returning to the rest of his soul, because the Lord had dealt bountifully with him, David recognized that God had delivered his soul from death, his eyes from tears, and his feet from falling. What else would David do because of this? “I will walk before the Lord in the land of the living.”

Have you stopped to ponder the bountiful provision of God? Has the Lord dealt bountifully with you? Has He fed, nourished, and sustained you? Has He supplied your needs and kept you alive? Has He dried your tears and brought you through things that you thought you would never make it through? Has He kept you from falling into sin and wickedness? Has He given you life and health, family and friends, breath, grace, and gifts? Why then do you not love Him more?

Why do you not walk more holily and righteously before Him? Why do you not take time to think through and list all the blessings God has bestowed upon you, and why you should love Him more abundantly for all that He has done for you? Why do you not tell Him that you love Him, that you have purposefully, deliberately, and willingly chosen to love Him, choosing Him over sin, wickedness, and rebellion? Why do you not determine right now to be more loving, obedient, kind, and gracious to your Heavenly Father?

Every one of us could make a list of why we should love the Lord, not just because of who He is, but because of everything He has done for us. Some of us are in better health than others, but even those

who have been sick—I have a few health problems—the truth of the matter is this, folks.

We've had more good days than we've ever had bad days. We've had more healthy days than we had sick days, and we've had far more joy than we've had misery. The goodness of God endures continually.

Have you ever thought what a great goodness it is on the part of our God that He condescends to be loved by poor sinful creatures like us? God does not need our love. There are no needs in God. God is the eternal self-existent One and the self-sufficient One. He does not really need anything. He is God. But He does want our love because He commands us to love Him over and over in the Bible. To me, this is a mind-bending blessing: to stop and think that by His grace and mercy, we are enabled to love the altogether lovely One, the eternal God who has revealed Himself in Jesus Christ our Lord.

The very fact that He condescends to receive our love in Christ should show us how honored and humbled we ought to be. Our great God and Father has granted us the grace to love Him. Have you ever stopped to think what you and I are by nature? The Bible says in Romans 8, verses 7 and 8, "For the carnal mind is enmity against God. It's not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God." God, in His grace and mercy, has regenerated and converted us and given us the ability to love Him.

If God had not worked in our hearts, we would still hate Him just like the wicked do. It is only God who made the difference in our lives. And we should love Him.

You remember that Peter had denied the Lord three times. In John 21:15, we read: “So when they had dined, Jesus said to Simon Peter, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these? He said, yea, Lord, thou knowest that I love thee. He said unto him, feed my lambs. He said to him again the second time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? And he saith unto him, yea, Lord, thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, feed my sheep. He saith unto him the third time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? Peter was grieved because he said unto him the third time, lovest thou me? And he said

unto him, Lord, thou knowest all things. Thou knowest that I love thee. Jesus said unto him, feed my sheep."

Christ asked Peter three times, "Do you love me?" Each time, Peter appealed to His omniscience: "Yea, Lord, thou knowest that I love thee." The third time Peter said, "Thou knowest all things. Thou knowest that I love thee." Like Peter, I know that God is omniscient and knows all things, but I want Him to hear my voice saying, "I love thee, O Lord," and I want Him to hear it frequently. I want Him to see that my love is demonstrated by my actions in obedience. Why would Peter have to appeal to our Lord's omniscience? Probably because Peter had not only denied the Lord, but had not said, "I will love thee, O Lord."

The Evidence of Grateful Love: Worship and Service Applications: Confessing and Demonstrating Love

Let me make some applications. Every believer, without the slightest hesitation, should confess, "I love the Lord." Immediately afterward, you could also confess, "I love the Lord because..." and begin delineating all the reasons why you should love Him, beginning with His person and all of those blessings. Such a confession would tend to humble and encourage us. It would make us far more grateful to our Heavenly Father if we said, "Lord, here is just a sample list of your multitudinous blessings toward me."

Now go back to Psalm 116. A truly grateful love will always be evidenced by acts of worship, praise, and adoration. After David said, "I will love the Lord because," he asked in verse 12, "What shall I render unto the Lord for all of his benefits toward me?"

"What shall I render to the Lord for all his benefits toward me?" David has listed some of the reasons and benefits he has received. Then he says, "I will take the cup of salvation and call upon the name of the Lord. I will pay my vows to the Lord now in the presence of all of his people." What is he saying?

"I will publicly worship and praise and adore you." Then, in verse 16, he says, "Oh Lord, truly I am thy servant. I am thy servant and the son of thine handmaid. Thou hast loosed my bonds. I will offer to thee the sacrifice of thanksgiving and will call upon the name of the

Lord. I will pay my vows of the Lord now in the presence of all of his people, in the courts of the Lord's house, in the midst of thee, O Jerusalem, praise ye the Lord." He said, "I'll become your servant." Why? Because of all your benefits, you loved me and I'm loving you, and I'm demonstrating it by serving you.

The profession of our love, acknowledgement of God's mercies and grace, recognition of his greatness, and consistency of deliverances in our lives should enable us to walk more holily, pray more fervently, obey more carefully, worship more frequently, be more studious of his word, and become more grateful and thankful individuals. That's why I said earlier, if we love the Lord, all these other things are going to fall into place.

Let me ask you a question. Love has a positive and a negative connotation. If I told Alice I loved her and then started running around three or four different women, would she believe me? I dare you know.

CHAPTER 16

The Necessity of Community

Introduction: The Necessity of Community

Ecclesiastes 4:9-13 says:

"Two are better than one; because they have a good reward for their labour. For if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow: but woe to him that is alone when he falleth; for he hath not another to help him up. Again, if two lie together, then they have heat: but how can one be warm alone? And if one prevail against him, two shall withstand him; and a threefold cord is not quickly broken."

"Better is a poor and a wise child than an old and foolish king, who will no more be admonished."

I originally thought of entitling this message, "The Necessity of Marriage and Community." Certainly these verses can very easily relate to marriage as well as community.

We understand that marriage is the normal and natural state of man. By that statement, I am not implying that those who are single are abnormal, not by any stretch of the imagination. It was God Himself who said in Genesis 2:18, "And the LORD God said, It is not

good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him.” Although marriage is the normal and natural state of man, it does not necessarily follow that everyone or every individual will marry.

Our Lord stated very clearly in Matthew 19:12: “For there are some eunuchs, which were so born from their mother's womb: and there are some eunuchs, which were made eunuchs of men: and there be eunuchs, which have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake.” And then he said, “He that is able to receive it, let him receive it.”

When you study 1 Corinthians 7, the Apostle Paul gives three reasons to marry and three reasons not to marry. Then, in 1 Corinthians 7:17, he says, “But as God hath distributed to every man, as the Lord hath called every one, so let him walk.”

"And so ordain I in all churches." The Apostle Paul is saying that there are some who have the gift of being single and others who have the gift of being married. Each one has his own gift from the Lord. Paul said in 1 Corinthians 7, verses 32 and 33, still speaking about marriage: "But I would have you without carefulness. He that is unmarried careth for the things that belong to the Lord, how he may please the Lord: But he that is married careth for the things that are of the world, how he may please his wife."

After giving three reasons to marry and three reasons not to marry, the apostle Paul tells us that there are advantages to being single as well as disadvantages. There are advantages to being married, and there are also disadvantages. Ed and I were talking recently about a mutual friend, an older fellow, and I asked why he had never married. The answer was that he simply liked doing what he wanted to do, when he wanted to do it, without answering anybody. Well, that is a pretty good reason. Some have the gift of being single; others do not. Personally, I certainly go, like our Lord, and lean very heavily toward the message that marriage is indeed the proper state of man, understanding that some do have a particular gift and will not necessarily marry.

Biblical Foundations of Community

Man is essentially a social creature, and men essentially require and demand what you and I would call interaction. It is exceedingly difficult for most to live alone without a wife, husband, family, or friends. We not only need social interaction; we need community. Community is a word which we in this generation know and understand relatively little. Think with me for a moment, biblically.

I am going to show you some truths from Ecclesiastes chapter 4. God's people have always dwelt in communities. We think about the nation of Israel, yet that nation was broken down into tribes and families. Each tribe and each family lived in its own territory or in its own nation.

In our English language, there is a confusing tendency to use the two words nation and country interchangeably. They are not identical. A country may consist of more than one nation. If we use the United States as an example, we could say that the United States is a country, but each of the states would be its own nation.

You remember when Robert E. Lee was offered the leadership of the Union Army, he refused it because he said he could not draw his sword against his own nation. His nation was Virginia. We speak of the southern nation, of Georgia as its own nation, and perhaps even of a Yankee nation or a Western nation. But let me tell you what a nation is. A nation is a body of people associated with a particular territory, bound by their faith, their family, their customs, and their morals, whose identity is sufficient for them to wish to possess a government peculiarly and particularly their own. So we can speak of a southern nation that wants its own southern government, or a Yankee nation that wants its own Yankee government.

But the same thing is true when it comes to community. A real, genuine community is made up of people with the same faith and practice, the same morals, and the same standards. So it should be obvious, just talking about nation and community, that multiculturalism is destructive of communities and nations as well. There is no unity in diversity. It is impossible. There is no community and no nation where different faiths, standards, practices, habits, and ethics can stand or exist together. It is only the

unity of faiths, standards, practices, habits, and ethics that makes a real community and a real nation.

I briefly looked over an article in which the Comanche chief spoke to a number of people, many of them white. He said, "There is a Comanche nation," and, "You white people will never be part of it," because they had their own faith, practices, customs, and their own race, so to speak, in the fact that they were birthed and born in the Comanche nation. He said, "And I'll never be called a racist." He was right. But he said, "If you do not come back to your faith and your standard and your ethics and your morals, you will cease to exist as a nation." And that is true, very true.

So the truth of the matter is this: There is no unity in adversity. Amos asked the right question in Amos 3:3: "Can two walk together, except they be agreed?" Obviously, no two people are going to walk together, at least not in real unity, unless they are agreed. And one of the most important questions, if we are going to walk together, is this.

Who or what is our authority, and what is our source of authority? If we do not have the same authority, or the same source of authority, then we are not going to walk together long. Obviously, if we are Christians, the sovereign God is our authority, and His Word is a source of our authority.

Historical Examples of Community

Even our forefathers lived in communities. During the patriarchal period, families always lived together in community. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob had large families, and they constituted a community, so much so that many of the heathen wanted to enter into leagues with them for mutual protection. Remember that Abraham, in his household alone, had 318 trained fighting men. The Bible says in Genesis 14:14, "And when Abram heard that his brother was taken captive, he armed his trained servants, born in his own house, three hundred and eighteen, and pursued them unto Dan."

If Abraham had 318 trained fighting men, most of them had wives and children. Then there was Abraham’s family and servants. Abraham probably had several thousand people living in and around

him. He was a community in and of himself, and all these people followed Abraham. When the children of Israel reached the Promised Land, remember that it was divided by lots into the tribes.

Each tribe, family, or clan had its own territory. These independent tribes, communities, and families made up the nation of Israel. There may have been twelve separate tribes, but it was those tribes, independent of each other, with their own territories, families, and clans, that made up the nation. Usually, marriage was within the same tribe. That did not necessarily prevent someone from marrying outside his tribe, but if he did, there was a problem with inheritance. So most of the time they probably married within their tribe. When you look at the Old Testament, they all lived in communities.

Now turn to Acts chapter 2. Let me show you how there was a community in the New Testament. When these Christians were converted by the grace of God, Acts 2:41 says, "Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls." Watch what these three thousand people, added to the existing number of believers, did.

The Bible said, “And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers. And fear came upon every soul: and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles. And all that believed were together, and had all things common; And sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need. And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, Praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.”

Now, contrary to the liberals, the unbelievers, and the agnostics, the first Christians were not Christian communists living under a communistic communal system. The fact that they shared things and had things in common did not mean that they were communists, because their sharing was totally voluntary and was not mandatory. For instance, look in Acts chapter 5. There you read about Ananias and Sapphira.

“ But a certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a possession, And kept back part of the price, his wife also being privy to it, and brought a certain part, and laid it at the apostles' feet. But Peter said, Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost, and to keep back part of the price of the land? Whiles it remained, was it not thine own? and after it was sold, was it not in thine own power? why hast thou conceived this thing in thine heart? thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God. And Ananias hearing these words fell down, and gave up the ghost. And great fear came on all them that heard these things. And the young men arose, wound him up, and carried him out, and buried him.”

“And it was about the space of three hours after, when his wife, not knowing what was done, came in. And Peter answered unto her, Tell me whether ye sold the land for so much? And she said, Yea, for so much. Then Peter said unto her, How is it that ye have agreed together to tempt the Spirit of the Lord? behold, the feet of them which have buried thy husband are at the door, and shall carry thee out. Then fell she down straightway at his feet, and yielded up the ghost: and the young men came in, and found her dead, and, carrying her forth, buried her by her husband. And great fear came upon all the church, and upon as many as heard these things.”

Now, I want to make this exceedingly clear. Look back at verse 4 and see what Peter said to Ananias: “Whiles it remained, was it not thine own? and after it was sold, was it not in thine own power?” He meant that Ananias did not have to sell the land; he could have kept it. Once sold, he did not have to give any money; he could have kept it. What was the sin of Ananias and Sapphira?

In Acts 4:36–37, Joses, surnamed Barnabas by the apostles, was a Levite from Cyprus who, having land, sold it, brought the money, and laid it at the apostles' feet. Barnabas evidently received praise or recognition because he sold his land and gave it all to the apostles, saying, in effect, Distribute it to whoever has need. He did not need or want the land; he preferred to give it to the believers.

Ananias and Sapphira sold their land, kept back part, and pretended that they were giving it all, as Barnabas had done. They wanted the praise and honor Barnabas received, but they wanted the money as well. Peter said, "Why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to

the Holy Ghost?" They had not lied to men, but to God. They did not have to sell the land or give any of it. The sin of Ananias and Sapphira, and the voluntary nature of the giving, do not negate the fact that the early Christians had community. They had real community.

They lived near one another, worked with one another, worshipped together, and had unity because they had the same faith and the same practice. It is impossible to have unity without the same faith and practice. You may be civil and kind to someone with a different faith and practice, but you cannot have unity with that individual. You do not have to become angry because someone does not believe as you do; you can still be kind and civil. But you cannot have unity with that individual because you do not think alike.

This is one reason God forbids believers to enter into covenants and contracts with unbelievers. He said, "What fellowship hath a believer with an infidel? What agreement hath the temple of God with idols?" The answer is absolutely none. It is our faith that unifies us. Therefore Paul said in Ephesians 4:5–6, "One Lord, one faith, one baptism, One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all."

Four Benefits of Community

The Shattering and Rebuilding of Community

Everything has to have real, genuine unity. The Christian community in Acts chapter 2 was shattered by the time you reach Acts chapter 8 and verse 1. The Bible said, “And Saul was consenting unto his death,” that is, Stephen’s death. “And at that time there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem.” “And they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judaea and Samaria, except the apostles.”

The persecution broke up the community and drove many of those Christians out. But wherever they went, they built communities of faith. They still worked together, worshiped together, and helped each other. It did not matter that the one community was broken up and they were driven away. Wherever they went, they built community again.

Look back in your Bibles to Ecclesiastes chapter 4. I want to show you very quickly four benefits of community. Look at verse 9. The first benefit is mutual labor: "Two are better than one; because they have a good reward for their labour."

Benefit 1: Mutual Labor (Ecclesiastes 4:9)

Have you ever noticed that it is easier to work when you have someone helping you? Of course, this is one of the reasons God instituted marriage. That is why He said He made a help meet: one who was suitable for man, able to help man engage in the work of dominion. If one does not have a wife or a husband, or if the work is far greater than a husband and wife can manage, it certainly helps to have family or friends, some family member, or at least a grandson around to help.

I do not know about you, but the older I get, the more I realize there are some things I can no longer do. I need help. It is just that simple. Mutual labor makes the time and work go faster, and you get twice as much done when you are working together. Working together is much easier. When I was in college, I used to have friends come over, or we would meet at the library and study together.

We would quiz each other on all the material. Not only did you learn more quickly, you had more minds working together, and time went quickly as well. You had the pleasure of fellowship, the benefit of conversation, and the benefit of someone helping you remember. The good reward he is talking about here is not only the pleasantness of conversation, but the consciousness of helping and laboring with each other. All this is grounded in faithful fellowship.

I remember years ago reading, or initially hearing about, a poem by Robert Frost entitled "Mending Wall." One proverb in that poem was simply this: "Good fences make good neighbors." When I first heard it, I interpreted it to mean, "You stay on your side of the fence, I'll stay on my side, and we'll get along just fine. You keep me out of your yard, I'll keep you out of mine. We won't get into arguments; we'll just avoid each other."

But that is not what the poem or proverb is about. When I started traveling up north, I realized exactly what Robert Frost had in mind.

Unlike down south, there are an awful lot of rocks in the north—rocks in fields. In fact, there are some fields, I believe, that grow rocks. You can plow them, and rocks come up everywhere. The farmers would get together, take the rocks out of the field, and make fences: one on one side, one on the other, building the fence together. They had fellowship, mutual labor, and mutual help. Sometimes, after the fences were built, rocks would fall off; then they would come back, work together, and rebuild the fence.

"Good fences make good neighbors." When I read the poem, I understood exactly what he was talking about: mutual fellowship, mutual labor, and mutual help. That is exactly what God is talking about here. Good help and good fellowship always make time and work go easier and faster. There is great comfort in good company, especially in the communion of the saints. That is why it is hard to get your attention to get started sometimes. You are talking so hard and fast to each other. That is wonderful; we understand that. Our Lord, in Mark 6:7, sent His disciples out two by two.

He did not send them out alone. He sent them out two by two, so they had their combined talents and fellowship to produce good benefit. Thus, the words, "Two are better than one; because they have a good reward for their labour," teach us that we may labor together in counsels, comforts, and mutual aids and assistance in spiritual things: church attendance, public worship, praying for each other, counseling each other, serving each other in love, bearing each other's burdens, and producing a good reward. We may profit from mutual instruction, counsels, and reproofs as we seek to establish each other in divine truth and strengthen each other's hands and hearts. Here is the first reason why we should have real community: mutual labor.

Benefit 2: Mutual Lifting (Ecclesiastes 4:10)

Notice verse 10 in Ecclesiastes chapter 4: there is mutual lifting. "For if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow: but woe to him that is alone when he falleth; for he hath not another to help him up." Obviously, two are better than one when it comes to accidents, incidents, and encouragements. One may lift another physically, spiritually, emotionally, mentally, and even materially. The verse teaches

absolutely the danger of being alone. I read recently of one man who lived alone and died. It took three weeks for them to discover that he was dead in his house.

I do go hunting, and usually when I go hunting, I tell Alice where I am going. If there is an accident, I do not want her to have to search for me. I want her to be able to get right to me so that I can get help. That is exactly what he is talking about: “If they fall, the one will lift up the other. But woe to him that is alone when he falleth; for he hath not another to help him up.” Now let us see how this is applied spiritually. Hold Ecclesiastes 4, but turn in your Bibles to Galatians chapter 6, verses 1 and 2: “Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted. Bear ye one another’s burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ.”

This is how we lift each other up. Each of us is a sinner. When we sin and a brother sees it, we seek to restore him in the spirit of meekness, considering ourselves. Then, of course, we try to help bear each other's burdens, whatever that burden is. That is why we have a prayer list: “Pray for me. I need help here. I need the Lord's grace here.” That is what it is all about—bearing one another's burdens and so fulfilling the law of Christ.

Elizabeth Cowper was a Christian woman who was going to be martyred along with Simon Miller during the reign of Bloody Mary, Queen Mary. They were both condemned to be burned at the stake. They were tied to the stake almost back to back, and the fire was started. When the heat arose fiercely, Elizabeth sighed and said, “And Simon Miller”—although his hands were behind him, he reached back with his fingers to touch Elizabeth and said, “Be of good cheer, good sister.”

“We shall soon have a joyful and sweet supper. It is but a winking a little and you're in heaven.” With these words, she valiantly and courageously gave her life without uttering another word, even in the torment of the flame. What was he doing? He was helping to bear her burden.

Hebrews 10:24 says, “And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works.” We do not just provoke each other; we

are to provoke each other unto love and good works. When was the last time you tried to encourage your brother or sister in Christ? When have you tried to provoke them to more holiness, godliness, and obedience? When was the last time you tried to provoke them to study and to pray?

This is what he is talking about: "Let us consider one another." I need to consider Henry. How can I make Henry more godly and more obedient? How can I make him more studious? How can I make Robert more studious? How can I help Ron? This is what he is saying: "Let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works."

Then he says in verse 25, "Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching." I believe that certain days are approaching very quickly, and we certainly need to be exhorting one another, and so much more as we see these days coming to pass. Can you imagine not only what this assembly would be like, but every other assembly wherein every Christian esteemed his brother or sister above himself, and did everything he could to provoke them unto love and to good works? The apostle is saying very clearly that we need to consider each other and provoke each other to love and good works.

So there is mutual labor, a benefit of community. There is mutual lifting. If you will look in verse 11, here is a third benefit: mutual love. "Again, if two lie together, then they have heat: but how can one be warm alone?"

Benefit 3: Mutual Love (Ecclesiastes 4:11)

Every married couple understands this clearly, for in all cases one of the spouses has cold hands, cold feet, or is simply cold all over. In my house, I know who has the cold feet—and it is not me. But notice what he says: "If two lie together, then they have heat: but how can one be warm alone?" The truth is that in cold weather two bodies are better than one. This does not necessarily refer only to married couples. You remember that when David was old and needed bodily heat, they sought a young woman to keep him warm.

There was nothing sexual about it. It was simply the fact that he needed a body to keep him warm. In 1 Kings 1:1–2 we read: “Now king David was old and stricken in years; and they covered him with clothes, but he gat no heat. Wherefore his servants said unto him, Let there be sought for my lord the king a young virgin: and let her stand before the king, and let her cherish him, and let her lie in thy bosom, that my lord the king may get heat.” Nothing sexual about it. He never knew her. It was simply the fact that he needed someone to keep him warm.

In emergency situations, men and women have piled together simply to keep from freezing to death. Heat transfer is real, and it does help. It is true not only physically, but it is also true spiritually.

Notice the question: “How can one be warm alone?” We could put this air-conditioning unit on sixty degrees in the middle of July or the middle of August, and let this room cool down to sixty degrees. Then we could get fifty people in this room. Pretty soon, it is not going to be sixty degrees. That air-conditioning system is not going to hold it at sixty, because all these bodies are 98.6. I have been in buildings for meetings where you walk in and say, “It’s chilly in here.” By the time the building got filled, you were sweating. That is a reality.

Do you understand that this is true in a spiritual sense in Christian communion? You can have two Christians who are basically grown cold in their love, lukewarm in their affections, and backward and indifferent to spiritual exercises. Yet by Christian conversation, Christian reproof, and Christian admonition, each begins to be stirred up unto loving good works. Two cold flints will make a fire. Likewise, even two cold Christians, when they come together and begin to talk about the Lord, the Word of God, and spiritual things, begin to warm up.

Proverbs 27:17 says, “Iron sharpeneth iron; so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend.” It is like burning coals. You can take coals that are warm, push them together, and they produce an awful lot of heat. But you can take those same coals, separate them, and they will die out.

Do you remember the two men on the Emmaus road in Luke chapter 24? They were joined by our Lord, who asked them, "What in the world is wrong with you folks?" They answered, "Are you a stranger here? Have you not heard about Jesus? We thought He was the Messiah. We thought He was the Deliverer. But yet He's been crucified. Besides all this, it's the third day." And our Lord said to them, "O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken."

"Ought not Christ to have suffered these things?" Then He began at Moses and all the prophets and expounded unto them all things concerning Himself. When they decided to stop for supper, He pretended that He would go on, but they compelled Him to come in. When He sat at supper and began to bless, their eyes were opened, and they knew it was Christ; and He disappeared.

Then they said, "Did not our heart burn within us, while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the scriptures?" Notice that: Did not our hearts burn within us? The Apostle Paul himself was on the way to Rome in Acts chapter 28 and verse 15. "And from thence, when the brethren heard of us, they came to meet us as far as Appii forum, and The three taverns: whom when Paul saw, he thanked God, and took courage." Paul was encouraged simply by the presence of believers.

In Philippians chapter 1 and verse 5, Paul thanked God for the fellowship of the Philippians: "For your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now." He was thanking God for their fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now. In other words, the very day they were saved, there was fellowship with the Apostle Paul. There was communion. That fellowship and communion continued.

The point is, if we desire the heat of love, truth, stability, and strength, we must have real, genuine community. You can only have real, genuine community by having one source of authority, one faith, and one standard. That standard is the Word of God, and the faith is in the Lord Jesus Christ. Look back in Ecclesiastes chapter 4 again at verse 12, because here is mutual liberation—not only mutual labor, mutual lifting, and mutual love, but now mutual liberation: "And if one prevail against him, two shall withstand him; and a threefold cord is not quickly broken."

Benefit 4: Mutual Liberation (Ecclesiastes 4:12)

If an enemy, thief, or robber attacks anyone in fellowship and friendship together, and the attacker is more than a match for the individual, then the other can join in and help resist him so that he will not succeed in his enterprise. Two are better than one in a fight. If Robert jumps on me to whip me, I sure want Ed and maybe Henry to come help me whip him. I do not have to fight him by myself. If one is overcome, the other may liberate him and free him from the oppressor. Three is even better than two.

If a family, church, community, city, or kingdom is divided against itself, it cannot stand. But if united, in all probability nothing can hurt it. Our Lord says they will be able to withstand the attack. “A threefold cord is not quickly broken.” A threefold cord gives a great illustration. You can take one strand of cord, and strong men can probably take it in each hand and pop that cord. But you can take three strands, weave them together, and usually the strongest man cannot break that cord. It takes more than a man.

It is the same thing with a dry branch. You can take one little branch and snap it very easily. But take a bundle of those branches, tie them together, and one man cannot snap them very easily. This is exactly what he is talking about. Christians in close fellowship, however few they may be, if they keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace, are, biblically speaking, as the Song of Solomon says, “terrible as an army with banners,” and the gates of hell cannot prevail against them. The whole secret is keeping the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

Do you know what the Apostle Paul told the Roman Christians in Romans chapter 16 and verse 20? “And the God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Amen.” Would you not like to see him bruised very definitely? Would you not like to see his representatives bruised very definitely? It can only be through the unity of the Spirit and the bond of peace. Let us consider a couple of lessons when he says, “If one prevail against him, two shall withstand him; and a threefold cord is not quickly broken.”

The first lesson is this: alone, we are an easy target. That is true physically, and it is true spiritually. May I ask you, when a wolf attacks the sheep, what sheep does he always go for? The answer is, the straggler, the one away from the flock. Do you realize that the safest place to be, if you are a sheep, is right smack dab in the middle of the flock? The safest place for all of us is in unity and fellowship and communion and community.

The second lesson is equally clear. We must learn to stand and fight together, or we will be destroyed individually. Do you remember what Benjamin Franklin said when the nation was seeking its independence from England? He said, "We must all hang together or we will hang separately." If we do not stand together, they will pick us off one by one. It is not only important to learn to live together; it is important to learn to fight together.

If you have the same faith, the same practice, the same morals, and the same ethics, you are probably going to have the same enemies. Therefore, you must learn to fight together. I am reading a very fascinating book I just got this past week, entitled Apache Tactics and Strategies. It describes how a handful of Apache warriors consistently and constantly defeated entire cavalry units. Some of these Indian warriors never had over 100 men; most of the time, 50 or 60.

Yet they would out-fight and out-fox several hundred well-armed soldiers every time. The whole key was this: they not only lived together and shared the same practice, customs, and basically the same faith; they learned to fight together. Thus they were able to destroy much stronger enemies consistently and constantly.

A Poor and Wise Child

The Poor Wise Child vs. the Old Foolish King (Ecclesiastes 4:13)

Ecclesiastes 4:13 says, “Better is a poor and a wise child than an old and foolish king, who will no more be admonished.” A poor child is usually held in contempt. He has nothing; he knows nothing and can do nothing. Age and poverty produce double contempt. Yet in this

situation he may be poor and young, but the Scripture says he is wise.

Compare and contrast this poor, young, wise child with an old and foolish king. The king has authority and stature. Along with venerable age, he has royalty and dignity. Yet he is foolish. The child who is poor, young, and wise may be held in contempt by most people. But in his wisdom he is wise enough to govern himself, to receive counsel and instruction, and pretty soon he is able to extricate himself out of his poverty. With time, he gets aged.

On the other hand, here is the king who will no more be admonished. He has neither wisdom to govern himself nor wisdom to receive counsel and admonition from wiser men. He is foolish, willful, and incorrigible. The child can be worked with; the king cannot be worked with under any circumstances. Could we not apply that today to our elected officials? I do not care if you are talking about state representatives or federal representatives, state senate or federal senate. The child can be worked with; the king cannot be worked with under any circumstances.

The point is clear: in a church and in a community where we are living, working, striving, and fighting together, we must always be willing and ready to receive reproof, rebuke, admonition, and instruction. Age and position do not negate the fact that we are all needful, and from time to time we must be rebuked, reproved, and admonished. The king was foolish because he thought his age and position excluded him from rebuke and admonition.

If you had to choose between a poor and wise child and an old and foolish king who would no longer receive instruction, which would you choose? Everyone would say, “I prefer to be the poor wise child.” If you have chosen to be the poor wise child, you have also chosen to be reproved, rebuked, admonished, instructed, worked with, and taught. You know what the Bible says in Proverbs 9 and verse 8?

“Reprove not a scorner, lest he hate thee: rebuke a wise man, and he will love thee.” Did you know the Bible says in Proverbs 27:5, one of my favorite verses, “Open rebuke is better than secret love”? And how about Leviticus 19:17: “Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thine heart: thou shalt in any wise rebuke thy neighbour, and not suffer

sin upon him." If we are going to be the poor wise child in church, in community, we must be willing to be instructed, rebuked, reproved, and admonished.

Conclusion: The Urgency of Genuine Community

I hope you see two things. First, the importance of real, genuine community—for life, for help, for protection, for safety, and for love, with all these benefits. Secondly, I hope you see the need and necessity of this even more in a time of danger, devastation, and destruction. The truth of the matter is, folks, we need each other. No man is an island, and I am afraid that in the not-too-distant future, we will understand how much we really need each other. We must have one faith and one source of authority: the Word of God.

Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we bow to Thee. We praise Thee and give Thee honor and glory. Lord, make us a real, genuine community of faith, not just a church, but a community that lives and loves and lifts each other and liberates each other and considers each other to provoke unto love and to good works. For Your honor and glory, in Christ's name we pray, amen.

CHAPTER 17

Where Is Your Heart?

Introduction: The Question of the Heart

In Matthew chapter 15, the scribes and Pharisees asked Jesus, “Why do thy disciples transgress the tradition of the elders? For they wash not their hands when they eat bread.” He answered, “Why do you also transgress the commandment of God by your tradition?” God commanded, “Honor thy father and thy mother, and he that curses father and mother, let him die the death.” But they said, “Whosoever shall say to his father or his mother, It is a gift, by whatsoever thou mightest be profited by me, and honor not his father or his mother, he shall be free.” Thus, Jesus said, they had “made the commandment of God of none effect by your tradition.” He called them hypocrites, saying, “This people draw nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoreth me with their lips, but their heart is far from me. But in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.”

The question today is straightforward: Where is your heart? When I ask that question, I am not asking where your physical organ is located. Practically everyone knows that the location of our physical heart is deep in our chest. However, our Lord taught and clearly

stated twice, once in the book of Matthew and once in the book of Luke, “For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.” Note that He does not say, “Where your treasure is, there is where your heart ought to be, or should be, or might be.” He says, “Wherever your treasure is, there your heart will be.”

The Heart Follows the Treasure

Whatever we consider our dearest treasure, we may be assured that there we will find our hearts. Where our hearts are, there is our treasure. We will surround and confine ourselves to our treasure, because that is where our hearts really, truly are. Treasure in heaven will keep our hearts there; treasure on earth will keep our hearts here. Our feet always follow our hearts. That is why the Bible says in Proverbs 4 and verse 23, “Keep thy heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life.” You will find that our feet will always run after our hearts.

One of the amazing things of Scripture is this: The Bible teaches very clearly that our hearts are very quickly and very easily led astray, because we always treasure that which we love and hold most dearly, and that which we really, truly desire. You remember the passage in Exodus 32 when Aaron had taken all their golden jewelry and fashioned a golden calf, and then the people began to dance around that golden calf and worship it.

And they said, "These be thy gods, O Israel, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt." In Exodus 32 and verse 8, God said, "They have turned aside quickly out of the way which I commanded them. They have made them a golden calf and worshipped it, and have sacrificed thereunto and said, These be thy gods, O Israel, which have brought thee up out of the land of Egypt." Notice what God said. They've turned aside quickly out of the way.

They had made a golden calf. They were worshiping an idol that they had made. So their hearts very quickly had turned from the one true and the living God to a false god, and they were giving worship and honor to that. Martin Luther is quoted as stating an obvious truth: "What a man loves, that is his God." Our hearts are always set upon that which we love, and that which we love, we adore.

Now, when our Lord, in Matthew chapter 15, is confronting and rebuking the Pharisees, He states a very obvious truth in verse 8: "This people draw nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoreth me with their lips." But He says, "Their heart is far from me."

Our Lord is either quoting Isaiah 29 and verse 13 or at least referring to it: "Wherefore the Lord said, Forasmuch as this people draw near to me with their mouth, and with their lips do honor me, but remove their heart far from me, and their fear toward me is taught by the precept of man." Whether you read Isaiah 29 and verse 13 or Matthew 15 and verse 8, here is the truth: There is a vast difference and a vast distance between lips and heart. If one's heart is not set upon Jesus Christ, the question is, upon what is it set?

The Deceitfulness of Idolatry: The Example of Micah

Where is the heart? It has to be somewhere, and it has to be set upon something. If it is not set upon Jesus Christ, then obviously it is set upon an idol. What our Lord is teaching here is very plain: professions without heart attachment are absolutely worthless, useless, and vain.

Before explaining and expounding this truth from Matthew 15, I want to give you a clear illustration from Scripture. One of the most striking stories—not necessarily funny, but it is funny—is found in Judges 17 and 18. This story demonstrates very quickly not only the deceitfulness of the heart, but also the uselessness and worthlessness of idols and idolatry.

As you turn to Judges 17, here is the story of Micah. He had stolen silver from his mother. His mother cursed whoever had stolen it, and thus he returned the silver to her. Judges 17, beginning with verse 1: “And there was a man of Mount Ephraim, whose name was Micah.”

“And he said unto his mother, The eleven hundred shekels of silver that were taken from thee, about which thou cursest and spakest of also in mine ears, behold, the silver is with me. I took it.” In other words, he stole it. Now watch what his mother says: “And his mother said, Blessed be thou of the Lord, my son. And when he had restored the eleven hundred shekels of silver to his mother, his mother said, I had wholly dedicated the silver unto the Lord from my

hand for my son to make a graven image and a molten image. Now, therefore, I will restore it unto thee. Yet he restored the money into his mother, and his mother took two hundred shekels of silver and gave them to the founder, who made thereof a graven image and a molten image, and they were in the house of Micah."

Here is a man who stole money from his mother and confessed it. She gave it back to him, then took two hundred shekels of silver and essentially made herself an idol.

He also got to himself a Levitical priest and said to himself, "Now the Lord is going to bless me for sure because I've got this priest to my service." The children of Dan were looking to expand, and as they surveyed the countryside, they came to Micah's house. They saw the Levitical priest, the image, and the molten image that had been made. As the children of Dan came back into the land to defeat the people of Laish and take their property, notice what they did: "Then answered the five men that went to spy out the country of Laish, and said unto their brethren, Do you know that there is in these houses an ephod, and a teraphim, and a graven image, and a molten image? Now therefore consider what you have to do."

"They turned thitherward, and came to the house of the young man, the Levite, even to the house of Micah, and saluted him. And the six hundred men appointed with their weapons of war, which were the children of Dan, stood by the entering of the gate. And the five men that went to spy out the land went up, and came in thither, and took the graven image, and the ephod, and the teraphim, and the molten image, and the priesthood in entering of the gate with the six hundred men that were appointed with weapons of war. And these went into Micah's house and fetched the carved image and the ephod and the teraphim and the molten image. Then said the priesthood to them, What do you?"

"They said unto him, Hold thy peace. Lay thy hand upon thy mouth. Don't say any more. And go with us. And be to us a father and a priest. Is it better for thee to be a priest in the house of one man, or that thou be a priest unto a tribe and a family in Israel?" The priest's heart was glad. He had gotten a promotion, brother—more shekels. The priest's heart was glad. He took the ephod and the

teraphim and the golden image, the graven image, and went in the midst of the people.

They turned and departed, putting the little ones, the cattle, and the carriage before them. When they were a good way off from Micah's house, the men who lived near Micah gathered together, overtook the children of Dan, and cried unto them. They turned their faces and said unto Micah, "What aileth thee that thou comest with such a company?"

And he said, "You've taken away my gods which I made, and the priests, and you're gone away. And what have I more?" The children of Dan answered, "Let not thy voice be heard among us, lest angry fellows run upon thee, and thou lose thy life with the lives of thy household." When the children of Dan went their way, and Micah saw that they were too strong for him, he turned and went back into his house.

If you look at verse 24, Micah said, "You have taken away the gods which I have made, and the priest, and you're going away, and what have I more?" What use were the gods that Micah had made? They could not protect themselves, and they could not protect Micah. He said, "What have I more?" Where was his heart? What was he worshipping?

Undoubtedly, Micah was one who professed to love the Lord. Even back in Judges chapter 17, verses 1 and 2, his mother said, "Blessed be thou of the Lord, my son." That is the word Jehovah, or Yahweh. In verse 3, she said that she had wholly dedicated this money to Yahweh, the one true and living God. Yet Micah had taken this money and made a graven image, a molten image, absolutely and totally contrary to the first three commandments. He professed with his lips that he loved the Lord, but his heart was set upon these gods that he had made. His heart was not set upon the one true and living God.

We can smile when we read this and think how stupid, naive, sinful, and rebellious Micah was. On the one hand, he professed to love the Lord, yet he had all these gods and this outlandish idolatry. We say that we would never be found in such a state or commit such obvious idolatry. Or would we?

Covetousness as Idolatry

Colossians 3:5 gives us a very, very emphatic word: “Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth, fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry.” Covetousness, which is idolatry. You know what covetousness is?

Really and truly, it is whatever we set our hearts upon. When we want something, when we desire something with an outlandish desire, we set our hearts upon it. We really, truly desire and crave it. What we do is place that desire over and above God and His Word, which is idolatry. That is what our Lord meant when He was very true, very accurate, and very right in saying, “For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.”

With this in mind, let us look at Matthew chapter 15 very closely. See how deceitful our hearts really are, and how very easy it is to fall into the sin of idolatry in our day and time.

No, you do not have to bow down to a graven image to be an idolater. Because covetousness is idolatry.

In Matthew 15:1, the Bible says, “Then came to Jesus scribes and Pharisees, which were of Jerusalem, saying…” The Pharisees were the fundamentalists of that day. They were contrasted with the liberal, unbelieving Sadducees. Acts 23:8 says, “For the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, neither angel nor spirit, but the Pharisees confessed both.” So, the Sadducees were the liberals. They denied the bodily resurrection from the dead. They denied angels or spirits. But the Pharisees—no, no, no. They believed in the resurrection from the dead. They believed in angels. And they believed in their traditions. So the Pharisees basically were considered the fundamentalists of that particular day and time. The Pharisees prided themselves on being law keepers and believers. The truth is, they were neither. They were idolaters.

The Pharisees: Tradition Over Truth

How do we know that most of professing Christendom today are in reality idolaters? Let me show you. In Matthew 15:2, the Pharisees ask Christ, “Why do thy disciples transgress the tradition of the

elders, for they wash not their hands when they eat bread?" First of all, note that they held to and believed in tradition over truth. They wanted to know why our Lord's disciples were transgressing the tradition of the elders. The Pharisees held tenaciously to the traditions and to the authority of antiquity. Their concern for unwashed hands was not of a sanitary nature. Their concern was, here was a tradition.

It was ceremonial, ritualistic, and mandatory as far as they were concerned. Their traditions involved far more than just the mere washing of the hands. In Mark 7:1–5, we find this same story with a little variation: "Then came together unto him the Pharisees and certain of the scribes which came from Jerusalem. And when they saw some of his disciples eat bread with defiled, that is to say with unwashed hands, they found fault. For the Pharisees and all the Jews, except they wash their hands often, eat not, holding the tradition of the elders. And when they come from the market, except they wash, they eat not."

The issue was not sanitary. Mark records: "And many other things there be which they have received and hold, as the washing of cups and pots, brazen vessels, and of tables. Then the Pharisees and scribes asked him, Why walk not thy disciples according to the tradition of the elders, but eat bread with unwashed hands?"

There is nothing wrong with tradition as long as, first, that tradition is biblical; or, second, if it is merely a tradition of men, everyone understands that it is not binding upon anyone's conscience. The only thing that can bind our consciences is the Word of God. Some traditions are biblical. The Apostle Paul, in 2 Thessalonians chapter 2 and verse 15, said: "Therefore, brethren, stand fast and hold the traditions which you have been taught, whether by word, or by our epistle." There are biblical traditions, but many traditions are totally and completely unbiblical. The traditions of the Pharisees were unbiblical. They were man-made, yet they wanted them to be mandatory upon every individual.

Albert Barnes explains that the word elders literally means old men, referring here to the ancients or their ancestors. Tradition means something handed down from one to another by memory: some precept or custom not commanded in the written law, but

which they themselves were bound to observe. The Jews supposed that when Moses was on Mount Sinai, two sets of law were delivered unto him. One was recorded in the Old Testament; the other was handed down from father to son and kept uncorrupted until their day. They believed that Moses, before he died, delivered this oral law unto Joshua, Joshua to the judges, and the judges to the prophets, so that it was kept pure until it was recorded in the Talmuds. These pretended laws were contained in those books.

They were exceedingly numerous and very trifling, yet the Jews regarded them as more important than either Moses or the prophets. One point in which the Pharisees differed from the Sadducees was their holding of these traditions. In the particular traditions mentioned here, however, all the Jews seem to have combined. Except they wash their hands often, the Pharisees and all the Jews eat not. Mark adds that this custom extended not merely to washing their hands before eating, but also to washing when coming from the market, and washing pots, cups, brazen vessels, and tables.

This they did professedly for the sake of cleanliness. So far that was well, but they made it a matter of superstition. They regarded external purity as of much more importance than the purity of the heart. They had made foolish rules about the quantity of water to be used, the way in which it was to be applied, the number of times it should be changed, and the number of those who might wash at one time. These foolish rules our Savior did not think it proper to regard, and this was why they found fault with Him.

It is true that there were laws concerning washings in the Old Testament, Leviticus 11, which related to pollution. However, these secondary laws, or traditions, were the mere inventions and interpretations of men, which the Pharisees held above the law. They believed there were two sets of laws: one written by Moses, and the other orally received, which Moses communicated to Joshua, Joshua to the judges, and the judges to the prophets. They maintained that this oral law was kept uncorrupted until their day.

Our Lord teaches otherwise. In Matthew 15, Peter said, "Declare unto us this parable." Jesus answered, "Are you yet also without understanding?" He continued: "Do not you yet understand that whatsoever goeth in, entereth in at the mouth, goeth into the belly,

and is cast out into the draught? But those things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart, and they defile the man. For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witnesses, blasphemies. These are the things which defile a man. But to eat with unwashed hands defileth not a man."

God's law did not demand that hands be washed before eating. Certainly it may be wise to do so for sanitary reasons, but God's law did not demand it. Yet the Pharisees, in their traditions, absolutely demanded it. How seriously did the Pharisees and the scribes hold to the tradition of the elders? There were two very popular schools in our Lord's day and before it as well.

They were known as the school of Hillel and the school of Shammai. These two schools taught the oral traditions. Listen to this quote: "Know then that the words of the scribes are more lovely than the words of the law. For says Arctarphon, if a man does not read he only transgresses an infirmity. But if he transgresses the words of the school of Hillel, he is guilty of death, because he has broken down a hedge and a serpent shall bite him. It is a tradition of our Ishmael, the words of the law having in them both prohibition and permission."

"Some of them are light, some of heavy. But the words of the scribes, all of them are heavy, weightier than the words of the elders and than the words of the prophets." Here is another quote: "My son, attend unto the words of the scribes more than the words of the law. For in the words of the law are infirmities and negatives. But the words of the scribes are heavy. Every one that transgresseth the words of the scribes is guilty of death."

What the Jews were doing was taking their traditions and holding them above the word of God. In Matthew 15:3, our Lord rightly asks these Pharisees, "Why do you also transgress the commandment of God by your traditions?" In verses 4 through 6, He gives them an example of how they transgress the law of God by their tradition. The Pharisees did not desire truth. They wanted their traditions.

There are many modern-day Christians who are equally farsighted. If you mess with their Christmas traditions, their Santa

Claus, their Easter Bunny, Halloween, and all the other traditions, you will find that you will be railed upon and excoriated just as our Lord was. I personally know pastors who have been run off from local churches because they did not want a Christmas tree in the church auditorium or a man dressed as Santa Claus in the church building. Instead of listening to the pastor, his exposition of Scripture, and his reasoning, they chose to have their own traditions and thus ran the pastor off. It is absolutely astounding how many people are willing to place tradition above truth. Many churches have been doing exactly the same thing for years.

If you try to show people, "What you're doing is not right according to the Word of God," they will quickly tell you, "We've done this way for the last fifty years or the last hundred years." What are they saying? "We're not going to change. It doesn't matter what the Word of God says. This is our tradition. This is the way that we've always done it, and this is the way we're going to continue to do it." So the Pharisees came to our Lord and basically said, "Why do your disciples transgress the tradition of the elders? We've always done it like this. Why are you changing things? Who do you think you are?"

They were not interested in truth. Traditions, unless they are biblical, really do not matter. Truth does matter. We as Christians believe that God's law is supreme and absolutely sovereign. We should be in submission to God's Word rather than to the traditions of man. So here is the question: Where is your heart? Is your heart in submission to the Word of God, or is it in submission to traditions? The Pharisees were idolaters because they placed tradition above truth. We as Christians must hold truth above everything.

The Pharisees: Religion Over Reality

Secondly, in Matthew 15 they held to and believed religion over reality. Look in verse 7. Our Lord told these Pharisees, "Ye hypocrites, ye hypocrites, what did Isaiah prophesy of you saying? This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips, but their heart is far from me." "But in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men." They were drawing nigh to our Lord with their mouth and

honoring Him with their lips, but teaching the commandments of men for their doctrine, which is mere religion.

Do you realize that religions are a dime a dozen? Anyone may start a religion. We are familiar with Scientology, Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormonism, and various other cults, sects, and isms. But there are others you may not have heard about, such as the Universe People, or Cosmic People of Light Powers; the Church of Subgenius; and the Church of Euthanasia, or COE. The Church of Euthanasia is a political organization started by the Reverend Chris Korda, which is a woman.

In the Boston, Massachusetts, area of the United States, she advocates that we need to kill ourselves in order to save the planet. I wonder why she has not done her part in saving the planet. If you really believe something, I think you would practice what you preached. But this is a Church of Euthanasia.

The Nuwabians originated as a black Muslim group in New York in the 1970s. The spelling is atrocious, but here is how it is spelled: The Temple of Psychic Youth. T-H-E-E Temple of O-V Psychic P-S-Y-C-H-I-C-K Youth. Also known as T-O-P-Y, it was founded in 1981 by members of Psychic TV, COIL, Current 93, and a number of other individuals. Obviously, spelling is not a fundamental part of this religion.

The ever-evolving network is a loosely federated group of people operating as a unique blend of artistic collective and practitioners of magic: the Temple of Psychic Youth. And then consider this unworthy news item. To me, if it were not so serious, it would be absolutely hilarious: Jedi religion is the most popular alternative faith.

Today's census figures show that 176,632 people in England and Wales identify themselves as Jedi Knights, making it the most popular faith in the "other religious" category on the census and the seventh most popular faith overall. Jedi Knights from Star Wars? Let me tell you something, folks: religion is not reality. These heresies hold to religion over reality. Reality is determined by God; it is not determined by man. One may fool himself, deceive himself, believe in himself, and yet never, ever face reality.

The truth of the matter is this: one thing all these religions have in common is that they are contrary to the Word of God, and many of them are immoral and refuse to face God's reality. They refuse to deal with sin, judgment, and truth. Like the Pharisees of old, they are condemned by our Lord. Turn to Matthew 23, while holding Matthew 15. I want to show you the curses that God places against the Pharisees and help you understand how applicable this is to all these false religions.

They all fall into the same category. In Matthew 23:13, our Lord says, “But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, for you shut up the kingdom of heaven against men, for you neither go in yourselves, neither suffer you them that are entering in to go in.” Our Lord made it plain in John 14:6: “I am the way, the truth, and the life, and no man cometh unto the Father, but by Me.”

Think of all these religions that deny the deity of Jesus Christ, or deny His humanity. They deny that Christ is either God or man; they deny altogether that He is salvation. Yet Scripture teaches that He is salvation alone. These false idolaters shut up heaven against themselves and against anyone who is going in. They do not want anyone to believe the truth or face reality; they hold their religion over reality. Look at Matthew 23:14.

Again, he says, "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, for you devour widows' houses, and for a pretense make long prayer, therefore you shall receive the greater damnation." Think not only of the Pharisees, but of all these other cults, isms, and schisms. Think of all the fraud, theft, and deceit involved in religion. How many people have been ripped off financially through fraudulent promises, prophecies, or prosperity blessings?

I never will forget, years ago, listening to the radio. There was a black preacher who called himself Reverend Ike. Rev. Ike would say, "This is Rev. Ike. If you want your pie in the sky, by and by, you don't need me. But if you want your pie right now, see and hear Rev. Ike." Then you needed to send in ten dollars for a blessing, and he would send you a blessing—a handkerchief that he had prayed over.

I'd like to sell handkerchiefs for ten bucks each too, wouldn't you? Wouldn't you buy them for a few cents? But think of all the people

who have been ripped off. Think how many have lost their physical lives because of false religions, and how many have lost their eternal souls because of false religions. Look in verse 15. He says, "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, for you compass sea and land to make one proselyte, and when he is made, you make him twofold more the child of hell than yourselves."

Students usually go beyond their teachers. They embrace error with far greater zeal and hold more tenaciously to it while defending it to the fullest. That is what he is saying here. Look at the people who embraced all these false teachings and even created more false teachings. Then look at Matthew 23 and verse 23. Our Lord says, "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, for you pay tithe of mint and anise and cumin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith. These ought you to have done, and not to leave the other undone."

Have you noticed how particular many religions are about small and sometimes insignificant issues? Yet they quickly overlook adultery, fornication, fraud, theft, and a host of other major sins. Even in many fundamental independent Bible-believing Baptist churches, as long as you are in church Sunday morning, Sunday night, and Wednesday night, attend visitation, and give, they will overlook fraudulent business practices, adultery, and fornication. Our Lord said, you will pay attention to some smaller things and overlook the greater things.

The next two woes illustrate this truth. In verse 25, He says, “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, for you make clean the outside of the cup and of the platter, but within are full of extortion and excess.” And in verse 27, “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, for you are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones and of all uncleanness.”

That is what false religions are all about: beautiful sometimes on the outside, absolutely corrupt on the inside.

Finally, the last verse demonstrates how religion fights against truth. Those who teach truth fight against and deny God's reality. In verse 29, He says, “Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites,

because you build the tombs of the prophets and garnish the sepulchres of the righteous." Religion always fights against reality. Reality is in Jesus Christ; it is not in religion. Reality is what the Word of God declares, not what man states.

The Pharisees: Willfulness Over Worship

So where is your heart? Are you holding tradition above truth, or religion above reality? In Matthew chapter 15, here is a third thing that our Lord condemns: the Pharisees held to and believed in willfulness over worship.

Go back to verse 7: "You hypocrites. You hypocrites. Well did Isaiah prophesy of you, saying, This people draw nigh unto me with their mouth and honoreth me with their lips, but their heart is far from me. But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men." Do you not see in this an absolutely willful attitude on the part of the Pharisees? When they came to Christ, they said, "Why do your disciples transgress the tradition of the elders?" In other words, you are not paying attention to our religion or doing what we believe ought to be done. The Pharisees had the attitude, "It's going to be our way or no way."

They were content with their ceremonies, rituals, and traditions. That was enough to satisfy them. They were not going to worship God the way God demanded; they were going to worship the way they willed to worship. If God could not be satisfied with what they gave Him, then He could do without. They were not going to change.

In Jude 1 and verse 11, the Bible says, "Woe unto them, for they've gone in the way of Cain." What is the way of Cain? The way of Cain is the way of self-will. You remember how God demanded that He be worshipped with a bloody sacrifice. The Bible says in Hebrews 9 and verse 22, "Without the shedding of blood, there is no remission of sin." When it came time to worship, Abel brought of the firstlings of his flock, the way God commanded him to bring. It was a bloody sacrifice.

But what did Cain do? Cain brought the fruit of the ground. Cain knew exactly what God demanded, but he refused to bring it. Cain's attitude was this: "What I've got is good enough for God, and if it's

not, He can do without. I'm going to give Him what I want to give Him. I'm going to give Him what I will to give Him. And I'm not going to change." Many people today follow the way of Cain. They would not admit it, and they would not even think that they would do so, yet they do.

Our Lord said in John 4, verses 23 and 24, "But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth, for the Father seeketh such to worship Him. God is Spirit, and they that worship Him, listen, must worship Him in Spirit and in Truth." If you are going to worship Him, you absolutely must be bounded on the one hand by Truth and on the other hand by Spirit. If you are not worshipping God in Spirit and in Truth, then you are not worshipping God.

Baptists today, as well as other denominations, instead of giving our Lord that which He requires, are content to go to a church building, sing a few hymns, listen to a short sermon, and think that somehow they have glorified God and worshipped Him. Others light a few candles, bow and scrape, recite a prayer, and walk out thinking that they have worshipped God, which is not true.

Our Lord says, "If you're going to worship Me, you must worship Me in spirit and in truth." Where is your heart? Are you at this moment worshiping Him in spirit and in truth? Are you giving Him that which He demands, or are you giving Him that which you want Him to have?

The Pharisees put tradition over truth, religion over reality, and their willfulness over worship. In Colossians 2:20-22, we read: "Wherefore, if ye be dead with Christ from the rudiments of the world, why as though living in the world are ye subject to ordinances, touch not, taste not, handle not, which are all to perish with the using after the commandments and doctrines of men." But notice verse 23: "Which things indeed have a show of wisdom in will worship and humility and neglecting of the body, not in any honor to the satisfying of the flesh."

Do you know that is exactly what most people do? They present God their willfulness and demand that God accept their willfulness over the worship that He demands they give Him. So where is your

heart? Are you giving our Lord that which He demands, or simply that which you want Him to have? You may not express it, but your attitude may be, “I'll give Him what I want Him to have, and if He doesn't like it, He can do without.” Our Lord said, “God is Spirit, and they that worship Him must worship Him in Spirit and in truth.”

We know that these Pharisees were idolaters because they held their tradition above truth, their religion over and above reality, and their willfulness over and above worship.

Applications: Heartfelt Worship and Submission

It does matter whether or not our hearts are involved in worship. It matters whether we worship according to the Word of God and whether we give God that which He demands. We should always value the will and the Word of God. Let me give you an example of David worshiping the Lord. In Psalm 103, verses 1-5, David said: “Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me. Bless His holy name. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits.”

“Who forgiveth all thine iniquities, who healeth all thy diseases, who redeemeth thy life from destruction, who crowneth thee with lovingkindness and tender mercies, who satisfyeth thy mouth with good things, so that thy youth is renewed like the eagle's.” “Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me. Bless His holy name.” What is he saying? I'm thinking of Christ. I'm thinking of His Word.

My affections are set upon Him. My spirit is being engaged by the Holy Spirit, and I'm giving God worship and honor for all of these things. He forgives all of my iniquities. He heals all my diseases. He redeems my life. He crowns me with loving kindness. He satisfies my mouth with good things. He renews my youth. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me.

We need to learn to make sure that everything in our being is given to God in our worship, both public and private.

The second application is this: It is much easier to be a Pharisee than it is to be a Christian. Pharisees only have to obey and keep their own rules. They can change them, make them up as they go along, and hold other people to a higher standard than themselves.

Christians must always be in submission to the Word and Will and Law of God, no matter the circumstances or situation. If you want a religion, Pharisaism is a very easy one. If you want salvation, that is found in Jesus Christ. If you want true Christianity, that is found in Jesus Christ.

So the question is, Where is your heart? Is it the heart of a Christian, or the heart of a Pharisee? May God make us totally, completely, and absolutely in submission to His Word.

Father, in Jesus Christ's name, we bow to Thee. We thank You, Lord, and give Thee praise, honor, and glory for Your Word and salvation. Lord, we ask You to make us holy, obedient, and godly. And Father, may we in all our life please Thee and be acceptable unto Thee, through Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, in whose name we pray, Amen.

CHAPTER 18

Preaching as Entertainment

The Bible says, “Also thou son of man, the children of thy people still are talking against thee by the walls and in the doors of the houses. And speak one to another, every one to his brother, saying, Come, I pray you, and hear what is the word that cometh forth from the Lord. And they come unto thee as the people cometh, and they sit before thee as my people, and they hear thy words, but they will not do them. For with their mouth they show much love, but their heart goeth after their covetousness. And lo, thou art unto them as a very lovely song of one that hath a pleasant voice, and can play well on an instrument. For they hear thy words, but they do them not. And when this cometh to pass, lo, it will come. Then shall they know that a prophet hath been among them.”

Introduction: The Offense of Entertainment in Preaching

Any God-called and God-ordained preacher would be visibly upset and highly offended if you complimented him by saying, “Pastor, I found your sermon very entertaining.” God's men are not called to entertain. They are called to preach, teach, counsel, instruct, command, warn, and comfort, but not to entertain. Likewise, any

serious-minded Christian who genuinely wants to obey the Lord and honor Him would be offended if the pastor asked, “Did you find the message entertaining today?” Entertainment is not a ministry of the church, and it should not be the goal of preaching.

One of the sins of modern-day Christendom is that preaching has become no more than entertainment for most people. Professing Christians are asking for services to be short, sweet, and entertaining. They are not really interested in biblical preaching and teaching or in biblical and scriptural worship. They simply want to get in, hear a sermon, get out, and get on with their lives.

Years ago, Alice and I were in Tampa, Florida, and my son-in-law was taking us out to supper. We passed a Baptist church, and on the marquee was a sign I have never forgotten: “Come to our early morning service, in by eight, out by eight-thirty.”

Now just stop and think about that. In by 8, out by 8:30. You know a Baptist church is going to sing a couple of songs. They are going to take an offering. They are going to pray. Then they are going to have another song in closing and another prayer. So that probably meant five to ten minutes of preaching at the absolute most. All it was was something simply to stab the consciences of people as they were going to the beach and spend their day at the beach.

Defining Entertainment and Amusement

When you think about entertainment, if you take the time and look up the word entertainment, you will find this definition: “The act of entertaining, agreeable occupation for the mind, diversion, amusement, something affording pleasure, diversion, or amusement.” Entertainment and amusement are closely related, often used interchangeably, and probably synonymous as well.

But, as you know, the word “muse” is in our Bible. The word “muse” actually means to think. It means to meditate. It means to turn something over in the mind, much like a cow chews the cud.

Look in your Bibles, first of all, to Psalm 143 and verse 5. David said, “I remember the days of old. I meditate on all thy works. I muse on the work of thy hands.” Then look in the book of Luke, chapter 3 and verse 15. Here is what is said concerning John the Baptist: “And

as the people were in expectation, and all men mused in their hearts of John whether he were the Christ or not."

So people were thinking and meditating and turning it over in their minds as to whether or not John the Baptist was actually the Messiah. Of course, he was not, but they were thinking that. When you put the alpha, or the "a," in front of the word "muse," it negates it.

So if to muse means to think and to meditate, to amuse means that you do not think and you do not meditate. Entertainment and amusement bypass the brain and go straight to the emotions and straight to the desires. When someone is being amused, there is no cognitive ability necessary. You do not actually have to think. You do not have to do anything except just sit there and, quote unquote, enjoy your amusement or your entertainment. It is that simple.

Ezekiel's Ministry and the People's Rebellion

If you look back in the book of Ezekiel, chapter 33, because that is where I am dealing with this passage, you will find that God reveals to Ezekiel what the people really and truly thought of his preaching. But first, let me tell you about Ezekiel. Ezekiel was a priest whom God called to be a prophet. He prophesied to the Judahites in Babylon before, during, and after the fall of Jerusalem. In Ezekiel 1:3, the Bible says, "...the word of the Lord came expressly unto Ezekiel the priest, the son of Buzi, in the land of the Chaldeans, by the river Chebar. And the hand of the Lord was there upon him." Note the words: the word of the Lord came expressly to Ezekiel the priest.

Ezekiel had a very interesting life and ministry. It was not only his preaching and teaching that were important. The things he went through and experienced were a sign, not only to the Judahites in Babylon, but also to those in Jerusalem. For instance, in Ezekiel 4, Ezekiel had to portray a siege against Jerusalem. God said, "Now also, son of man, take thee a tile, and lay it before thee, and portray upon it the city of Jerusalem." He was to draw an outline of Jerusalem and lay siege against it.

The Lord continued, "And build a fort against it, and cast a mount against it. Set the camp also against it, and set battering rams against it round about. Moreover, thou shalt take unto thee an iron pan, and set it for a wall of iron between thee and the city, and set thy face against it, and it shall be besieged, and thou shalt lay siege against it."

Then He said, "This shall be a sign to the house of Israel." Ezekiel basically had to play army—not that he was merely playing. He built a little fort and battering rams, and God said, "This is a sign. This is what's going to happen." He also had to lie on one side for a certain number of days and on the other side for a certain number of days as he portrayed the siege. People would ask, "What in the world is going on?" Look at Ezekiel 12.

SCRIPTURE READING - Ezekiel 12:1-6; Ezekiel 24:15-24 (KJV)

> “The word of the Lord also came unto me, saying, Son of man, thou dwellest in the midst of a rebellious house, which have eyes that see and see not, they have ears that hear and hear not, for they are a rebellious house. Therefore thou, Son of man, prepare thee stuff for removing, and remove by day in their sight. And thou shalt remove from thy place to another place in their sight. It may be they will consider though they be a rebellious house.”
>
> “Then shalt thou bring forth thy stuff by day in their sight, as stuff for removing, and thou shalt go forth at even in their sight as they that go forth into captivity. Dig thou through the wall in their sight, and carry out thereby. In their sight shalt thou bear it upon thy shoulders, and carry it forth in the twilight. Thou shalt cover thy face that thou see not the ground. For I have set thee for a sign to the house of Israel.”
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> Ezekiel has to break into his own house. He digs through the wall, takes his furniture and personal property out, and carries it to another place, because he is portraying and is a sign that this is exactly what is going to happen to the people still in Jerusalem. His life is entirely a sign.
>
> It is not just his preaching that is important, but what happens to him. In Ezekiel chapter 24, God takes away his wife and

> commands him not to weep or cry: “Also the word of the Lord came unto me saying, Son of man, behold, I take away from thee the desire of thine eyes with a stroke,” that is, his wife. “Yet neither shalt thou mourn nor weep, neither shall thy tears run down. Forbear to cry, make no mourning for the dead. Bind the tire of thine head upon thee, and put on thy shoes upon thy feet, and cover not thy lips, and eat not the bread of men.”
>
> “So I spake unto the people in the morning, and at even my wife died, and I did in the morning as I was commanded. And the people said unto me, Wilt thou not tell us what these things are to us, that thou doest so? Then I answered them, The word of the Lord came unto me, saying, Speak unto the house of Israel. Thus saith the Lord God, Behold, I will profane my sanctuary, the excellency of your strength, the desire of your eyes, and that which your soul pitieth; and your sons and your daughters whom ye have left shall fall by the sword.”

"And ye shall do as I have done. Ye shall not cover your lips, nor eat the bread of men. And your tires shall be upon your heads, and your shoes upon your feet. And ye shall not mourn or weep, but ye shall pine away for your iniquities, and mourn one toward another. Thus Ezekiel is unto you a sign. According to all that he hath done shall ye do."

"And when this cometh, ye shall know that I am the Lord." Even after Ezekiel had prophesied and preached, God told him that he would be mute, unable to speak until someone escaped from Jerusalem and told him that Jerusalem had fallen. In Ezekiel 24:26, he says, "...he that escapeth in that day shall come unto thee, to cause thee to hear it with thine ears," that is, Jerusalem is fallen. "In that day shall thy mouth be opened to him which is escaped, and thou shalt speak, and be no more dumb, and thou shalt be a sign unto them, and they shall know that I am the Lord."

Ezekiel was an individual who had a very interesting ministry, to say the least. His life, as well as his words, spoke volumes not only to those Judahites already in Babylon, but also to those left in the land of Judea. The interesting thing is that God told Ezekiel before he ever began preaching that the people were not going to listen. In

Ezekiel 2:3, God said, "Son of man, I send thee to the children of Israel, to a rebellious nation that hath rebelled against Me."

SCRIPTURE READING - Ezekiel 2:3-8 (KJV)

> They and their fathers have transgressed against me even unto this very day. For they are impudent children and stiff-hearted. I do send thee unto them; and thou shalt say unto them, Thus saith the Lord God. And they, whether they will hear or whether they will forbear, for they are a rebellious house, yet shall know that there hath been a prophet among them. And thou, son of man, be not afraid of them, neither be afraid of their words, though briers and thorns be with thee, and thou dost dwell among scorpions: be not afraid of their words, nor be dismayed at their looks, though they be a rebellious house. And thou shalt speak my words unto them, whether they will hear, or whether they will forbear, for they are most rebellious. But thou, son of man, hear what I say unto thee; be not thou rebellious like that rebellious house. Open thy mouth, and eat that I give thee.
>
> So God is telling him that the people to whom he's going to preach and teach are impudent, stiff-hearted, and rebellious.

In Ezekiel 3:4, God says, “Then he said unto me, Son of man, go get thee into the house of Israel, and speak with my words unto them.” God explains, “For thou art not sent to a people of a strange speech, and of a hard language, but of the house of Israel.” In other words, Ezekiel did not have to learn a foreign tongue. He was not sent to many people of a strange speech or hard language, whose words he could not understand. Yet God says, “Surely had I sent thee to them, they would have hearkened unto thee. But the house of Israel will not hearken unto thee. For they will not hearken unto me. For all the house of Israel are impudent and hard-hearted.”

God continues: “Behold, I have made thy face strong against their faces, and thy forehead strong against their foreheads, as an adamant harder than flint have I made thy forehead. Fear them not, neither be dismayed at their looks, though they be a rebellious house.” Moreover, He says, “Son of man, all my words that I shall speak unto thee receive in thine heart, and hear with thine ears, and go, get thee to them of the captivity, unto the children of thy people,

and speak unto them, and tell them, Thus saith the Lord God, whether they will hear, or whether they will forbear."

Twice in two chapters, God essentially tells Ezekiel, "You are going to preach to your own people. You do not have to learn a foreign language. But the people to whom you are going to preach are rebellious and stiff-hearted. They are not going to hear or listen to you." So here is my question: How many preachers would really enjoy having a ministry in which nobody listened to them? There were no converts. There was no revival.

That ought to teach us something. Success in God's eyes does not deal with numbers; it deals with faithfulness. Ezekiel was faithful to the ministry that God gave him, and he was successful in the eyes of God.

Here is another question. We are going to look at Ezekiel 33 and seek to expound that passage. In light of the fact that God called Ezekiel and told him that the people were not going to listen, that they were not going to repent, and that they were a rebellious house, why would they continually come to hear Ezekiel preach and teach? Let us go back to Ezekiel chapter 33 and begin at verse 30.

The People's Hypocritical Attendance (Ezekiel 33:30-31)

God had called Ezekiel, and his whole life was a sign. His ministry was to his own people. In verse 30, God says, "Also thou son of man, the children of thy people are still talking against thee by the walls and in the doors of the houses. And speak one to another, every one to his brother, saying, Come, I pray you, and hear what is the word that cometh forth from the Lord."

Notice how God talks to Ezekiel. He says, "the children of thy people." He did not say "my people" or "my children." God was not acknowledging them as His people at this particular point. They might be Ezekiel's fleshly brethren, but they were certainly not His. While they were talking about Ezekiel and concerning Ezekiel, they were actually talking against him. Interestingly, it was by the walls and the doors of the houses.

John Gill hits the nail on the head when explaining verse 30: “These speak against the prophet. They could not say that he was no prophet. He had his credentials and commissions from the Lord, which were well known, and many of his prophecies had been fulfilled. They could not speak against his doctrine, which was of God, nor against his conversation or conduct which was agreeable to his character and office. But they said some things in a ludicrous and jovial manner, in a sliding and contemptuous way, as showed that they had little reverence and respect for him. They were careless and indifferent about hearing him, at least had little regard to this matter, or the subject of his ministry, which they had no great value for.

“And this they did still. They had been long at it. It was their common talk and constant business, though the prophet knew nothing about it. And though they had the greatest respect for him, speaking fair to his face and behaving with decency toward him, the Lord knew it, and resented it, and informs him of it.”

And this they did continually from time to time by the walls and in the doors of the houses, privately and secretly. By the walls, they used to get together, sun themselves, and pass away their time by talking against the prophet. They placed themselves against the walls so that nobody might overhear them. Sometimes they stood in the porches of their houses and, as their neighbors and acquaintances passed by, called them in and held a chat about the prophet. They jeered and laughed at him and what he had said, saying to one another, “Come, I pray you, and hear what is the word that cometh from the Lord. Let us go and amuse ourselves for an hour or two with the prophet. Perhaps we shall hear some new thing which may be pleasing and diverting.”

They came, not for their spiritual profit, but to have their ears tickled and their fancies pleased. Oh, John Gill hit it right on the head. They were talking about him; they were talking against him. They were actually making fun of him because he believed what he was preaching.

This may have been one of the complaints they made against Ezekiel, for Ezekiel himself acknowledges it: “Then said I, O Lord God, they say of me, Doth he not speak parables?” In other words,

they were saying, “I understand what he is saying. He is speaking in parables.” Yet he may have been speaking plainly.

Our Lord said concerning the Pharisees in John 8:47, “He that is of God heareth God’s words. Ye therefore hear them not, because ye are not of God.” These people, who certainly were not of God, would not understand, however plainly Ezekiel spoke. But if they complained that he spoke in parables and was hard to understand, consider the word God gave him in chapter 21, verses 1–3: “And the word of the Lord came unto me, saying, Son of man, set thy face toward Jerusalem, and drop thy word toward the holy places, and prophesy against the land of Israel, and say to the land of Israel, Thus saith the Lord, Behold, I am against thee, and will draw forth my sword out of his sheath, and will cut off from thee the righteous and the wicked.” I do not know about you, but that sounds pretty plain to me.

And certainly that would give them something a little more to talk about, I am sure. Now, interestingly, let us go back to Ezekiel 33. In verse 30, they were simply talking against Ezekiel and making fun of him. God is still talking about the same people in verse 31: “…they come unto thee as the people cometh, and they sit before thee as my people, and they hear thy words, but they will not do them. For with their mouth they show much love, but their heart goeth after their covetousness.”

These people were not troublemakers. They were not rabble-rousers. They were not defiant. They were not shaking their fists in Ezekiel’s face or threatening him. No! They were coming and sitting respectfully, listening to everything that he had to say. If you look back at verse 30, what did they say? “Come, I pray you, and hear what is the word that cometh forth from the Lord.” Here was a group of people coming, sitting, and listening to everything Ezekiel had to say. However, there was a threefold problem.

First, although they heard the word of God, they refused to obey. He says, “And they hear thy words, but they will not do them.” Here was a stubborn, rebellious people who heard, but refused to obey. They would not apply the truth. They would not practice the truth. They simply refused to obey.

Secondly, they were hypocrites. He said in verse 31, “For with their mouth they show much love.” In other words, they were all talk. There was nothing in their life that was genuine and sincere. There was no substance to their lives—just simply talk.

Thirdly, their heart went after their covetousness. If you would hold Ezekiel 33, but look back in your Bibles to Isaiah 29 and verse 13, you will see Isaiah dealt with this same problem. Isaiah 29:13 is also quoted in the New Testament by our Lord. Here is an apt illustration of what is happening in Ezekiel 33:31. Watch Isaiah 29:13.

“Wherefore the Lord said, Forasmuch as this people draw near to me with their mouth and with their lips to honor me, but remove their heart far from me, and their fear toward me is taught by the precept of men.” God said, Here is a people that know how to talk the talk. They know the lingo. They can say, “Yes, the Lord is gracious. Yes, the Lord is true. Yes, the Lord is alive. Yes, the Lord is the real sovereign God of heaven and earth.” They know how to talk. They can use their lips and mouth, but their heart is far from Him, and the only thing they know about God is what they have been taught by man. God has never taught them.

They have been raised in church and in a Christian school, so to speak. They have heard it all their lives from men, but God has never dealt in their hearts. They talk a good talk with their mouth, but their heart is far from Him. That is exactly what is happening in Ezekiel 33:31. First, they refused to obey. Secondly, they were hypocrites. Thirdly, the reason they refused to obey was that they were idolaters. “But their heart goeth after their covetousness.” Their heart goes after their covetousness.

Covetousness is when you desire something that is not yours and is contrary to God, or something that you place above God. Suppose Gary was a multimillionaire. Now, he is not, but suppose he was. If I think, “I would love to have his money,” and covet it, that is sin and wickedness. I can covet a man’s wife or a man’s automobile.

Let me show you the problem with covetousness. Remember now, He says, “their heart goeth after their covetousness.” Hold Ezekiel 33. Turn in your Bibles to the book of Colossians, chapter 3, and look

at verse 5. Here is the problem with covetousness. God says, "Mortify," meaning to make dead, "therefore your members which are upon the earth, fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness which is idolatry."

How can covetousness be idolatry? It is very simple. If God says, "Thou shalt not steal," and I scheme and plan to take some of Gary's money from him, I am violating the commandment, "Thou shalt not steal." I am placing myself and my desires ahead of God and His commandments. Thus, I am an idolater.

That is exactly what God is saying about these people. He says they will not obey. They are all talk. The reason they will not obey and the reason they will not talk is because they are covetous, and their covetousness is idolatry. They do not really worship God. They do not really know Him. They have no desire for Him.

So here is the important thing. Look what He says again in verse 31. Ezekiel 33: "And they come unto thee as the people cometh, and they sit before thee, as My people," notice, "and they sit before Thee as My people." These people came professing to be God's people, sitting respectfully and listening to all that Ezekiel had to say. With their mouths they showed much love and much adoration. They were nice, pleasant, and respectful, but their hearts were far from God and far from Ezekiel. As the Septuagint puts it, it was because of lies in their mouths. They said they loved God, but of course they did not.

They were hearers of the word, but not doers. That is basically the sad state of modern-day Christendom. People go to church all the time and hear all the time, but they do not obey. They do not bring their lives into conformity to the Word of God. I have preached for 53 years, soon to be 54, and I have no idea how many churches I have preached in while traveling all around this country.

When you preach, you get to looking at the congregation. Some people sit there with a blank stare, and you wonder, Is anything registering? Others look out the window, wondering whether a bird just lit on a limb. A little child gets up to go to the bathroom, and everybody watches him all the way, as though they had never seen a child go to the bathroom before. You look around and think, That

person is daydreaming. That person is not listening. That person is sitting there planning his whole week.

God said that sooner or later they would find out that a prophet had been among them. He gave them the Word of God. They should have heard, listened, and obeyed, but they did not. Everything they had heard and everything they should have obeyed would now be for their condemnation and not their blessing.

Look at verse 32, where God reveals why these people kept coming. They refused to obey; they were all talk and they were idolaters. Why, then, would they keep coming? God says to Ezekiel, "And lo, thou art unto them as a very lovely song of one that hath a pleasant voice, and can play well on an instrument. For they hear thy words, but they do them not."

Preaching as a 'Lovely Song' (Ezekiel 33:32)

They came to hear Ezekiel, not to be instructed, warned, taught, counseled, encouraged, or comforted. They came to Ezekiel to be entertained. It was a pleasant way to pass the time and receive a little amusement. Matthew Henry in his commentary said this on this passage.

"Thou art unto them a very lovely song." Ezekiel's matter was surprising, his language fine, his expressions elegant, his similitudes apt, his voice melodious, and his delivery graceful, so that they could sit with as much pleasure and hear him preach as if, in the language of our times, they were seeing a play or an opera, or hearing a concert of music. Ezekiel was to them as one that had a pleasant voice and could sing well or play well on an instrument.

Men may have their fancies pleased by the word, and yet not have their consciences touched, nor their hearts changed; the itching ear gratified, and yet the corrupt nature not sanctified. That is true today. I usually have to make a confession: when I first started preaching, I did not stand behind a pulpit as such. I would start behind the pulpit, but I would move around. I would be on this side of the auditorium and that side of the auditorium. I was younger, had a lot of energy, and was very enthused about what I was saying.

In one little town in Alabama, after I got through preaching, a lady came up to me and said, "If you could let me know if you're ever within a hundred miles of this area, I would like to come hear you preach. I would drive a hundred miles just to watch you jump around and hear you talk." I said, "Lady, I don't think it will do you a bit of good."

You may ask, "How did you learn to stand still?" That was when cameras came out. One of my pastor friends said, "You've got to make up your mind whether you want to be on a camera or not. If you're going to be on a camera, you've got to stand still." I said, "Okay, I'll stand still." I am simply pointing out that people are easily entertained. Anything that will entertain them, whether it is spiritual or not, is immaterial; they will go for entertainment. I am afraid that is where most of our churches are today, simply for entertainment.

Now, look in verse 33. God says, "And when this cometh to pass, and lo, it will," because God had prophesied it, God told it, and Ezekiel preached it, "then they shall know that a prophet hath been among them." They will know that here was a man they should have listened to, heard, and obeyed, but they did not. It will be too late for them; it will not benefit them, but they will know that a prophet of God had been among them.

The Certainty of Judgment (Ezekiel 33:33)
Application: When Hearing Becomes Entertainment

When one does not hear, obey, or heed the preached Word of God, practically speaking, all the service has been is entertainment—a diversion, something that affords a little pleasure and an opportunity to pass some time. That is what Ezekiel is told: they come to sit before him, not to obey, but to be entertained.

I have heard people say, “I just love to look at those stained glass windows. Oh, I love to see the choir in those robes and hear that beautiful choir music. Or I love to hear that special music. I just enjoy hearing my preacher preach.” Really. But has your life been changed? Have you become more obedient? More repentant? More conformed to the Word of God and to the Lord Jesus Christ? If the preaching of the Word of God does not bring repentance, obedience, and faith into your life, you have just been entertained. That is all.

Matthew Henry said, “Those have arrived at a great pitch of profaneness, who can make so great a privilege and so great a duty as the preaching and hearing of the Word of God a matter of sport and ridicule, yea, though it be not done publicly, but in private conversation among themselves. Then it says serious things should be spoken of seriously.”

What is Matthew Henry talking about? I learned early in my ministry that there is a term called “roast preacher.” When people do not like what is being preached, they usually attack the preacher and talk about him in some way. It is not whether I agree or disagree, though they will talk about that as well. It is not whether something is biblical or scriptural: “Well, I just disagree with him.” “Well, I don’t like the way he said it.” It does not matter that it is biblical; they become intent on the way something was said.

I never will forget an illustration I heard—and, in fact, was there to witness. Four young men were making fun of the preacher and the worship service. They were not heathen; they were professing Christians. The preacher became upset and said, “Young men, if you came in here to worship and honor the Lord, you are welcome to stay. But if you came in here just to mock, make fun, and ridicule, there are four doors here. You can hit either one of them on the way out.” I used that illustration to make the point that when you come to church, you come to worship.

If I remember correctly, we had about 120 or 130 people in the congregation that day. After the service, one man came running up to me, very upset. “Why do you want me to leave the church?” he asked. I said, “What are you talking about? I don’t want you to leave the church.” He replied, “You were looking right at me when you said, ‘There are four doors here.’ You didn’t even want them all the way out.” I said, “Sir, first of all, I didn’t even see you. Secondly, I would have to be looking at somebody when I said it.”

You see what I’m talking about? It is not whether something is biblical or right; it is just whether we like it or do not like it.

I preached in a little church in Oglethorpe, Georgia, where the service started at eleven. They sang until fifteen minutes to twelve, and they told me how much they loved singing. When I stood up to

preach, I said, “I love singing as much as anyone, but I think the Word of God has to have the preeminence.” I added, “I have a little rule: always preach at least twice as long as the congregation sings.” So I preached for an hour and a half that morning. I had been invited home with the family afterward because I was preaching there that night and having dinner. The woman was very upset, and she told me curtly that the roast was burned because I preached past twelve o’clock.

She had it set to be done at twelve, and she didn't get out till one or after. People come to get out; they never come to get in. If you ever got in with God, you wouldn't care what time you got out. That night, when I went back to preach, they sang five minutes and quit. They really loved to sing, you could tell. But I preached an hour anyhow. This is exactly what was happening in Ezekiel's time.

They were talking about the prophet. Matthew Henry says that you have to reach the epitome of profaneness to take something as serious as the preaching and teaching of the Word of God and turn it into sport and ridicule. He said in verse 31, "And they come unto thee as the people cometh, and they sit before thee as my people."

Do you realize that worship is far more than behaving yourself decently and reverently in a public assembly? You may not be whispering, laughing, gazing about, or sleeping, but if you sit there listening to that sermon, wishing everything would be over so you could get out, get on with your life, and do what you need to do, you have not worshipped God at all. Just because people come, sit respectfully, and listen reverently does not mean that they have worshipped God. These people had their heart far, far from Him. In verse 33, he says, "And when this cometh to pass, and lo, it will come to pass, then they shall know that a prophet hath been among them."

Sooner or later, you will discover, as did the Judahites, that the Word of God is true and should be obeyed. You may discover it too late, yet you will discover it. Do not place yourself in the position of these Judahites. In light of everything that has been preached today, let this admonition remain with you. Jeremiah asked, "To whom shall I speak and give warning that they may hear? Behold, their ear is uncircumcised, and they cannot hearken. Behold, the word of the Lord is unto them a reproach. They have no delight in it."

Admonition: Delight in God's Word Through Obedience

You have to make sure that the Word of God is not a reproach in your life. You have to make sure that you delight in it. You delight in it when you hear it, obey it, apply it, and bring your life into greater conformity to the Word of God.

According to Romans 8:29, we have been predestinated to be conformed to the image of Jesus Christ. If we are conformed to His image, made like Him, it will be through obedience to the Word of God. If we do not obey what is taught, preaching is nothing more than entertainment.

Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we bow before Thee this day. We thank Thee for Thy Word, Thy truth, and the life of Ezekiel. Help us to learn, obey, and bring our lives into conformity to Thy Word. Give us grace to serve Thee acceptably with reverence and godly fear. In the name of Jesus Christ, we ask and pray. Amen.

CHAPTER 19

How Deep Is Your Faith?

Introduction to the Stony Ground Hearer

In Mark chapter 4, we are going to read verses 5 and 6, and then verses 16 and 17. The title of the message is, “How Deep Is Your Faith?” Look at Mark chapter 4, beginning with verse 5. Our Lord says, “And some fell on stony ground, where it had not much earth. And immediately it sprang up, because it had no depth of earth. But when the sun was up, it was scorched; and because it had no root, it withered away.”

Now skip down to verse 16, where our Lord interprets this parable. He says, “And these are they likewise which are sown on stony ground, who, when they have heard the word, immediately receive it with gladness, and have no root in themselves, and so endure but for a time. Afterward, when affliction or persecution arises for the word's sake, immediately they are offended.”

The parable of the sower, as I pointed out last week, is also sometimes known as the parable of the soils. It is all about hearing the Word of God. I pointed out last week as well that there are four distinct types of hearers given to us in this parable. Each one of these

hearers was present not only in our Lord's time, but is also present in our time.

Notice how our Lord began this parable. Look in Mark 4 and verse 3. He says, “Hearken; behold, there went out a sower to sow.” It begins with the word “Hearken,” and if you skip down to verse 23, He ends the parable by saying, “And if any man have ears to hear, let him hear.” You begin with “Hearken,” and then, “if any man have ears to hear, let him hear.”

Let me remind you of last week's message and its main points. The title of last week's message was “Did You Lose Something?” It was all about the wayside hearer. There is another name for the wayside hearer: sometimes he is called the hard-hearted hearer. The main points that I covered last week concerned this hearer.

Whenever the Word of God is preached, there is a present activity of Satan to hinder, destroy, and disturb. According to this parable, Satan is always attempting to steal the Word of God. Unless our hearts are prepared, we will never benefit from the Word of God. The wayside hearer's heart was never prepared: the seed fell upon the wayside, was trodden upon, and he cared absolutely nothing about it. The ground was not tilled; there was nothing concerning preparation. The wayside hearer was also negligent. The seed was there in plain sight. He could have picked it up, but he did not. I want you to understand that it is our responsibility to make sure that we hear the Word of God.

You remember the Scripture said, "Take heed what you hear." Then in Luke 8:18 He said, "Take heed how you hear." It is our responsibility not only to hear the Word of God, but also to make sure that it does not slip from our minds.

Today I want to consider the second type of hearer. He is known not only as the stony-ground hearer, but also as a shallow-hearted hearer. Mark 4:5 says, "And some fell on stony ground, where it had not much earth; and immediately it sprang up, because it had no depth of earth: but when the sun was up, it was scorched; and because it had no root, it withered away." Connect the words "stony" and "shallow."

The Nature of Stony Ground

There are many gardens and fields with stones in them whose plants bear quite well. When we hear of stony ground, we tend to think of ground with an awful lot of rocks or stones. If you go up north, you will find plenty of fields with lots of stones in them. We do not have that problem down south. There are a few fields with rocks—little red rocks and pebbles, and sometimes a quarter-size or 50-cent-size red rock—but that is about it. When you go up north, there are simply rocks everywhere.

But you can have an excellent crop in a rocky field like that. Years ago, I was preaching at a camp in Pennsylvania. A creek ran by the cabin where I was staying. One morning, I got up and took a walk down by the creek. Several hundred yards from the cabin, I came upon a sight that absolutely amazed me. I have never forgotten it. Right there in front of me was a rock.

The rock was at least as big around as half the size of this room, and it was probably twelve to fifteen feet high. I looked up, and it was double my height and then some. Sitting right on top of that rock was a full-grown pine tree. The diameter of the tree was probably fifteen to twenty inches. Its roots went down around the rock, into the ground, and into the creek. It was an unbelievably healthy, living pine tree right on top of that rock.

A rock will not necessarily stop a plant from growing. If you have ever been to Yosemite or that part of the country, you may look up and see a solid sheet of rock, a mountain that is a solid sheet of rock. Yet, in a crevice somewhere, you see a big tree growing right out of that solid rock. There is a little split in the rock, and the seed was able to penetrate into the ground in that split; then you have a tree growing there.

When we think of stony ground, we normally think of ground that has a lot of rocks in it, but that is not true. When our Lord speaks of stony ground, He is talking about ground or a field in which there are only a few inches of topsoil, and under it is a solid layer of stone or rock. In such a field, plants cannot find much depth. They cannot really take root, and therefore they spring up very quickly.

Consider two gardens. One has what we would call good soil or good ground, where the soil has been tilled and plowed deeply. The second garden has very shallow soil, and beneath it is a solid layer of rock. Till it as deeply as you can, but the rock prevents you from going any deeper. If you plant gardens in both plots, in both types of soil, you are going to make a very important, clear, and cogent observation shortly.

You will admire your stony-ground garden because, all of a sudden, those plants will shoot up and spring up very quickly. They will look green and great, and you will wish that your good-ground garden would do as well as this stony-ground garden. In fact, you will be absolutely amazed at how good your stony-ground garden really does. You may become concerned that your good-ground garden is not doing any good at all.

Comparison of Two Gardens

Over on the stony ground, you already have plants up, and they look green and great. Over here on the good ground, you do not even have any plants up; they are not even protruding from the soil. You think, "I wish this garden would do as well as this garden. What is the difference? Why does the stony-ground garden look so great so quickly?"

The answer is this: The stony-ground garden looks great simply because the seeds you planted cannot produce a solid root structure. Yes, they have some roots, but they are very shallow. Consequently, all the energy of the plant goes into producing the stalk and shooting it above ground. When you look at the good-ground garden and say it is doing poorly because there is nothing up, the seed is developing a root system first. Once it has a stable root system, it begins to send energy to the plant, sending the stalk up above ground.

So you have these two gardens. The stony-ground garden appears fine, great, and healthy, and promises great results until the heat comes, the wind comes, or a rainstorm like the one we recently had with seven or eight inches of rain comes. Then all those plants on the stony ground fall over and die because they cannot take the pressure; they cannot take the tribulation.

Now, the stony-ground hearer, according to our Lord, is much like this. The stony-ground hearer, or the shallow-ground hearer, is one who immediately rejoices at the Word of God.

Characteristics of the Shallow-Hearted Hearer

He receives it quickly, joyfully, readily, and easily. He is exuberant, responsive, and joyful, excited about the Word of God, and he excites all those around him. They marvel at how easily and quickly he was converted. His life appears to promise real fruit, but appearances fade away very quickly, because he fades away and falls away just as quickly.

The shallow-ground hearer cannot take persecution. He cannot take prosecution, tests, trials, or tribulations. In such problems, his attitude quickly becomes, "If I have to go through this to be a Christian, I don't want any part of it," or, "I did not sign up for all of this," or, "The cost is too high." He jumps out as quickly as he jumped in. He does not want to suffer or face difficulties for the truth's sake.

Each of us has seen and known individuals like this. They respond quickly, readily, and easily to the Word of God. They begin with a burst of energy, their motivation is great, and you look at that individual and think, "This man is going to set the world on fire." A year later, you cannot find him. Sometimes it does not even take a year—sometimes only months, weeks, or a few days. Our Lord is talking about the man who hears with a shallow heart.

Lesson 1: The Temporary Believer

The seed fell on stony ground. What lessons are we to learn from the stony-ground hearer? First, we must learn that there is such a thing as a temporary believer. I did not say there is such a thing as a temporary Christian. If you define a Christian as someone who is Christlike, then there are temporary Christians, because there are times in our lives when none of us acts like Christ consistently and constantly. But I am using Christian to refer to true, genuine believers who have been regenerated and converted, repented of their sins, and believed savingly upon Jesus Christ. In that sense,

there is no such thing as a temporary Christian. A real, genuine Christian does not apostatize and does not leave the faith.

The Scripture is teaching us there is such a thing as a temporary believer. You may ask, How do you know that? Because the Bible tells us. Look in your Bibles, first of all, to Matthew 13 and verse 21. I want you to see what the Scripture says in Matthew chapter 13 and verse 21. Our Lord is talking about the stony-ground hearer, or the shallow-hearted hearer, and He says:

"Yet hath he not root in himself, but dureth for a while: for when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, by and by he is offended."

Now look, if you would, at Mark 4, verse 17. Our Lord, once again, is interpreting this parable for us. He is talking about the stony-ground hearer, and He says:

"And have no root in themselves, and so endure but for a time: afterward, when affliction or persecution ariseth for the word's sake, immediately they are offended."

Now, if you look in the book of Luke chapter 8 and verse 13, again our Lord is talking about the shallow-hearted, or the stony-ground hearer. In Luke 8 and verse 13, this is His interpretation, not mine. He says:

"They on the rock are they, which, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no root, which for a while believe, and in time of temptation fall away."

Now, I have given you three phrases from Matthew, Mark, and Luke. Matthew says he "dureth for a while." Mark says he "endures for a time." And in Luke he says, "which for a while believe." The only conclusion that you can come to is that there is such a thing as a temporary believer. They are not saved. They have never been saved. But they temporarily believe. They may have joined the church. They may have gotten baptized. They may sing in the choir. They may even teach a Sunday school class temporarily. But they are not saved.

How do we know? The answer is because the Word of God specifically tells us. Look at Mark chapter 4 again, and let us begin

reading at verse 14. I want you to see this in light of the context. Remember the message that I preached last week, “Did You Lose Something?” concerning the wayside hearer. Watch this carefully. Mark chapter 4 and verse 14: “The sower soweth the word.” Our Lord says, “And these are they by the wayside, where the word is sown; but when they have heard, Satan cometh immediately, and taketh away the word that was sown in their hearts.”

Let me ask you a question: Is the wayside hearer saved? It could not possibly be, because the Word of God is stolen from him. Now watch verse 16. Our Lord is talking about the stony ground hearer, and He says, “And these are they likewise.” In other words, they are just like the wayside hearer: “These are they likewise, which are sown on stony ground, who, when they have heard the word, immediately receive it with gladness.” Obviously, clearly, these are they likewise. The stony ground hearer is in the same predicament as the wayside hearer. The wayside hearer had the Word of God stolen from him. He was negligent. He had no concern for the Word of God. And now our Lord says that those who fall on stony ground are likewise. In other words, just as the wayside hearer is lost, so our Lord says the stony ground hearer is lost as well.

I do not know whether you have ever asked yourself this question, but I am going to ask it: Have you ever considered why professing believers leave the church, leave the faith, and walk away from everything that has to do with Christianity? Have you ever asked that question? The truth of the matter is that we are given the answer. The reason they leave the faith, leave the church, and leave anything and everything to do with Christianity is because they were never Christians to begin with.

I want you to look in your Bibles to 1 John 2 and verse 19. 1 John 2 and verse 19. I want you to look at what the Apostle John teaches us. 1 John 2 and verse 19. Here it is. 1 John 2 verse 19. John talking about these people. He says, "They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us." Now I want you to look at what John says. They went out, that is they left, and they forsook the true believers, they forsook the church, they forsook the work of God,

that it might be made manifest that they were not genuinely converted to begin with. John clearly states, "for if they had been of us," that is, if they had really, genuinely been one of us, "no doubt," he said, "they would have continued with us." True believers always persevere in faith and repentance and obedience and they hold steadfast to the Word of God.

Those who are truly regenerate, those who are born of incorruptible seed and trust Christ and continue in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship of the church as true believers, they will not and they cannot ever apostatize. You say, but true believers have trials, true believers have tribulations, true believers have problems. Yes, they do. And yes, we do. And yes, I do. And yes, you do. But tests and trials and persecution will always drive a true believer closer to the Lord Jesus Christ, closer to His Word. It will drive him to claim His promises and it will drive him to seek divine help and mercy. Those who have real faith will never defect and never apostatize. Those who do not have real genuine faith will always defect and will always apostatize.

I want you to understand one simple truth. The Lord knows who belongs to Him. I want you to turn in your Bibles to the book of John chapter 10. John chapter 10. I'm sure many of you can quote this passage. But I want you to turn there because I want to show you the opposite truth in just a moment. Look in John chapter 10. And notice if you would please verse 14 and what our Lord said. John chapter 10 and verse 14. Look at what our Lord says. John 10 verse 14. Our Lord said, "I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine." What does he say? "I know my sheep." Now let me just quote a verse, and then we're going to look at another verse here in John chapter 10. In 2 Timothy chapter 2 in verse 19, the Bible says this, "Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his."

"And let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity." The foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his.

When our Lord says, "I know my sheep," and Scripture tells us that He knows His own people, there is an opposite truth. He also knows who does not belong to Him. In John 10:26, He told the

Pharisees, "But ye believe not, because ye are not of my sheep, as I said unto you. My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me." Our Lord knows not only who His sheep are, but also who does not belong to Him.

John Gill wrote this about the stony-ground hearer: "He is one that not only constantly attends upon it, but he receives it. He gives an assent to it. He believes in it historically, makes a profession of his faith in it, holds it for a while, being under some convictions of the truth of it, and having some speculative notions of it, and light in his understanding and judgment in it. He has some flashes of natural affection for it, and delivers some outward expressions of pleasure and delight in it, like Herod and the hearers of John the Baptist, but has no heart work, and so is like the rock in stony ground. The natural hardness of his heart continues. It remains unbroken by the word, without any true sense of sin and repentance for it, and destitute of spiritual life, of true faith, love, joy; hence, his profession is taken up in haste. Immediately upon a flash of affection and a little head knowledge, he does not last long, nor prove honorable."

Scripture is telling us that there is such a thing as a temporary believer. When you see people fall away from the faith, leave the church and other believers, and want nothing to do with Christianity, mark it down: They were temporary believers, and they went out from us that it might be made manifest that they were not of us; for had they been of us, no doubt they would have continued with us.

Joyful Response Is Not Always Saving

Here is a second truth we must learn from the stony ground hearer: not all joyful response to the Word of God is a saving response. All true Christians are happy to see people respond positively to the Word of God. We are especially thrilled when someone readily, eagerly, quickly, and joyfully responds to the Word of God. In fact, we see so little positive response at times that we are gratified just to see any response.

Lesson 2: Not All Joyful Response Is Saving

But we have an old saying: “Don’t count your chickens before they hatch.” We could expand upon that: “Don’t count your Christians until they prove true.” You never know what a man is until he gets under persecution, into tribulations, trials, and affliction. Just because someone gives a joyful response to the Word of God does not mean that he is a genuine Christian.

Turn in your Bibles to Acts chapter 8. I want to show you someone who joyfully responded to this truth along with a whole lot of others, and yet this one was definitely lost. He was never converted, never saved, never regenerated. Let us begin reading in verse 5. Watch carefully now.

“Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them. And the people with one accord gave heed unto those things which Philip spake, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did. For unclean spirits, crying with loud voice, came out of many that were possessed with them: and many taken with palsies, and that were lame, were healed. And there was great joy in that city.” Watch this joyful response: “And there was great joy in that city. But there was a certain man, called Simon, which beforetime in the same city used sorcery, and bewitched the people of Samaria, giving out that himself was some great one: to whom they all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, saying, This man is the great power of God. And to him they had regard, because that of long time he had bewitched them with sorceries.” Now watch: “But when they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women.”

"Then Simon himself believed also." Simon believed also. There is such a thing as a temporary believer. "Then Simon himself believed also: and when he was baptized, he continued with Philip," and wondered, beholding the miracles and signs which were done.

"Now when the apostles which were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent unto them Peter and John: who, when they were come down, prayed for them, that they might receive the Holy Ghost: (for as yet he was fallen upon

none of them: only they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.) Then laid they their hands on them, and they received the Holy Ghost. And when Simon saw that through laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Ghost was given, he offered them money, saying, Give me also this power, that on whomsoever I lay hands, he may receive the Holy Ghost. But Peter said unto him, Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money. Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter: for thy heart is not right in the sight of God. Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee."

"For I perceive that thou art in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity."

Here is a man who evidently, joyfully, happily, easily, quickly, and readily received the Word of God. He was not only receptive of the Word of God; he was baptized and continued with Philip. Yet when Peter caught up with Simon, he had some strong words for him. When Simon offered money to buy the gift of the Holy Ghost, Peter said, "Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money." He said, "Thy money perish with thee." Can I tell you what Peter literally said? "Your money go to hell with you." The Greek word "perish" is apoleia in the Greek. It is a very strong word and literally means to go to hell, or to go to the destruction which consists of eternal punishment.

So he told Simon very clearly, “Your money and you are on your way to hell.” Peter then said to Simon, “Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter.” In other words, you have nothing to do with Christianity. You are not a Christian, regenerated, or saved. “I perceive that thou art in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity.”

Here was a man who professed faith, was baptized, and continued with Philip, yet was as lost as he could be. Not all joyful responses to the Word of God are saving responses. Simon responded joyfully, but had nothing to do with Christ or Christianity. Indeed, the immediate reception of God’s Word with joy tends to prove that the heart will not retain the seed, because the conscience was probably never really penetrated.

When you are genuinely convicted of your sins, it is serious. You consider that you are in God's presence; that your sins are great and plentiful; the punishment they deserve; and that God is infinitely holy and righteous. Conviction of sin makes you serious. If the conscience has never been penetrated, the seed can take no root. The Word received for the joy it imparted is given up when tribulation comes and there is no joy.

Such a faith is nothing more than a flash in the pan. You know where we get the expression "flash in the pan"? From those old muzzleloaders, flintlocks, because that powder that was in the pan should set off the powder in the muzzle or in the barrel, but sometimes the pan just flashes and no spark goes into the barrel, so the weapon is never really fired. It is just a flash in the pan. It is worthless. It is useless.

That is what our Lord is saying about this individual. Such a temporary faith and such a joyful response with no root is just a flash in the pan. Why? Because immediate joy without conviction of sin is absolutely worthless. And something else must be remembered: there is no grace that has not been counterfeited by the wicked one. For every real grace, there is always a counterfeit. Immediate joy, by itself, is no indication of a real, genuine conversion.

So two things have been learned so far. First of all, there is a temporary believer. Secondly, not all joyful response to the Word of God is a saving response.

Lesson 3: Time Tests Faith

Thirdly, time is the great test of faith. Enduring for a while, believing for a time, and professing and possessing a temporary faith will not suffice. The one that is ever savingly believed evidences that faith by continuing to believe. The one that is ever savingly repented evidences that repentance by continuance in repentance.

John 8:30 says, "And as he spake these words, many believed on him." Then Jesus said to those Jews which believed on him, "If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed," or, "then are ye my true disciples." Perseverance is always demonstrated by preservation. The truth of preservation is shown in Jude 1:1, in the

book of Jude, right before the book of Revelation. We will come back to John 10, but first consider Jude 1:1.

Jude 1, verse 1: “Jude, the servant of Jesus Christ, and brother of James.” You know, I've always thought that was interesting. You know who James was? He was the brother of Christ too. And so was Jude, but he says, “I'm the brother of James.” He doesn't say, “I'm the brother of Christ.” “Jude, the servant of Jesus Christ, and brother of James, to them that are sanctified by God the Father, and preserved in Jesus Christ, and called.” So we are preserved. There's no two ways about that. We're not pickled, we're preserved, okay? You're preserved with sweet stuff, you're pickled with sour stuff.

Now, let me show you our preservation. Our Lord says, “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me.” “And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand. I and my Father are one.” So Jude says that we're preserved in Jesus Christ. Our Lord said He gives us eternal life and we shall never perish.

How do I know that I have eternal life? How do I know that I am preserved in Jesus Christ? Here's the answer. Our preservation comes to light in our perseverance. Those who have been preserved are enabled to persevere by the grace of God. That's why our Lord said, “If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed.” The proof that we've ever savingly believed is that we continue to believe. The proof that we've ever savingly repented is that we continue in repentance.

There are several other passages that you might not be aware of. First of all, look in the book of Colossians, chapter 1 and verse 23. Then we will turn over to Hebrews. “If ye continue in the faith grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the gospel, which ye have heard, and which was preached to every creature which is under heaven; whereof I Paul am made a minister.” What did he say? “If ye continue in the faith grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the gospel.”

Trials and Temptations Manifest Real Faith

God preserves us. His preserving power and grace come to light in the fact that He enables us to continue, so that we do not move away from the faith or from repentance. Hebrews 3:14 says, "For we are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence stedfast unto the end." We are made partakers of Christ if we hold fast. How can any man in his own strength hold fast? We cannot even keep our minds clean and clear by ourselves for one second. The answer is very clear in Scripture: it is God's preserving power that enables us to persevere.

We have learned that there is such a thing as a temporary believer. Not all joyful response to the Word of God is a saving response. Time is a great tester of the faith. In other words, you tell me, "I used to believe"—well, do you now? "I used to be a Christian"—are you one now? The fourth thing we are to learn is this: trials and temptations manifest real faith.

Lesson 4: Trials Manifest Real Faith

Fair-weather Christians abound everywhere, but the question must be asked: where are the Christians when the storms of life, persecution, trials, and tribulations abound? He who forsakes the faith due to trials and tribulations is revealing the fact that he was never ever a Christian to begin with. The Apostle Paul in Acts 14:22 said, "Confirming the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God."

Paul encouraged those believers to continue in the faith and understand that it was only through much tribulation that we would enter into the Kingdom of God. Our Lord never promised an easy life. He never promised us that, as Christians, everything would be rosy. He never said that we would not have trials, tribulations, and persecutions. I want to show you what He did say in John 15. I am sure that you already know what I am about to point out, but here is what our Lord did say, and we can put this down for truth.

In John chapter 15, verse 18, our Lord said, “If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you. If ye were of the world,

the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you. Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept my saying, they will keep yours also. But all these things will they do unto you for my name's sake, because they know not him that sent me." Our Lord said, you are going to have trials. You are going to be hated, despised, and persecuted.

Mark it down. Remember the passage in 1 John chapter 2 and verse 19: "They went out from us." Why? "That it might be made manifest they were not of us." If you flee in a test, trial, tribulation, or persecution, our Lord says it is evident. It is evidence that you were never genuinely saved to begin with.

One reason our Lord allows persecution, tests, and trials is that they are absolutely necessary for the church. We should never be disturbed, upset, or perturbed by what happens to us, to other Christians, or to people in general. In the Old Testament, when they cleaned wheat, they would go to the top of a hill or mountain where there was a good wind. They would throw the wheat into the air on a sheet; as the chaff rose, the wind blew it away, leaving the genuine grain. Do you know what persecution and tribulation do? They separate the wheat from the chaff. I have known individuals who seemed to be gung-ho Christians: "We'll do this, and we'll do that."

When trouble, persecution, trials, and afflictions come, those who cannot take the pressure flee like rats from a sinking ship. Persecutions and trials are a great way to purge the flock, because only real, genuine, committed Christians will remain and stay true.

Applications and Conclusion

We must remember the old Puritan saying: "The sharp needle of the law must precede the scarlet thread of the gospel." Anyone who has not been thoroughly convicted of his sins, even if he gives a joyful response to the Word of God, will not remain. He cannot remain. It is impossible for the seed to penetrate a stony heart. If the sharp needle of the law has not broken that stony heart and produced

genuine conviction and genuine repentance, the response given will not stand.

Many are greatly affected by the Word for the immediate present, yet receive no real or abiding benefit from it. It is like the crackling of thorns under a pot. Dried thorns and grass ignite instantly, burn brightly and beautifully, but only briefly; then they are gone. Likewise, these stony-ground hearers burn and shine temporarily because they are temporary believers.

Even King Herod heard John and heard him gladly, yet he still cut off John's head and remained unrepentant. This same King Herod was glad to see Jesus Christ. Luke 23:8 says he was exceedingly glad because he hoped to see some miracle done by Him—not because he wanted to believe in Him or trust in Him.

Just because someone is immediately affected does not mean that it is permanent, because time is the great test of faith. Some rejoice at the preaching and teaching of the Word of God, but their rejoicing is shallow and superficial. It is like Ezekiel 33:32, where God told Ezekiel, “Son of man, all you are to these people is a very lovely song.” They come as God's people and sit before him as God's people, but they do not listen or receive.

All you are to them is entertainment. So the question is, how deep is your faith? Does it produce fruit? Is it evident? Does it manifest itself in perseverance? The depth of your faith matters. If it has not penetrated the heart, conscience, and mind, it is only temporary faith, and persecution will reveal it.

What we want is real, genuine conversions, evidenced and manifested by continuance in truth and in the Word of God. Without this, there are no real Christians. Real Christians are made by God—not by circumstances, situations, or responses—but by the grace and power of God.

The wayside hearer was lost, and the stony-ground hearer is lost. It does matter how deep our faith really is.

Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we bow to Thee this day. We thank You for Your love, grace, mercy, and truth, and ask, Heavenly Father, that You would be pleased to make us understand these principles, bring our lives into greater conformity to Your Word, and

give us grace to persevere and continue in those graces and mercies in our lives. Give us grace that we may serve Thee acceptably with reverence and godly fear. In Thy name we pray. Amen.

CHAPTER 20

The Disappearing God

Introduction: The Disappearing God

Our text is 1 Samuel 3:21: “And the Lord appeared again in Shiloh, for the Lord revealed Himself to Samuel in Shiloh by the word of the Lord.” The title of the message is “The Disappearing God.”

That title may sound strange, but in light of the context, you will understand what I am teaching. The Bible plainly tells us that the Lord appeared again in Shiloh. Our text gives us a very insightful truth, and it is one we are not accustomed to considering. We are plainly told that the Lord appeared again in Shiloh. Obviously, if He appeared again, there was a time that He disappeared. The word again is significant: it tells us that His appearing at Shiloh had occurred before and that there had been an intervening absence. Thus the text raises questions about where He went and about the circumstances surrounding His appearing. So the question is, where did He go? Why and how did He show up when He did?

The History and Corruption of Shiloh

In order to understand our text, we must know something about Shiloh. The history of Shiloh matters because these events place the tabernacle there when Israel was in the land. In Joshua 18:1, the Bible tells us that the tabernacle was first set up there: “the whole congregation of the children of Israel assembled together at Shiloh and set up there the tabernacle of the congregation there, and the land was subdued before them.” This was the time when Israel was in the land and the tabernacle was first established at Shiloh.

Joshua 19:51 also tells us that all the land was divided among the twelve tribes at Shiloh: “These are the inheritances which Eliezer the priest and Joshua the son of Nun and the heads of the fathers of the tribes of the children of Israel divided for an inheritance by a lot in Shiloh before the Lord at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation.” Shiloh was the place where the congregation assembled, where the tabernacle stood, and where the inheritance of the tribes was apportioned before the Lord.

So they made an end of dividing the country. Notice that they did it by lot in Shiloh before the Lord, at the door of the tabernacle. It is also true that it was at Shiloh that God was initially worshipped. In 1 Samuel 1:3, we read about Elkanah, Hannah his wife, and Peninnah, who was also his wife: “And this man,” speaking of Elkanah, “went up out of his city yearly to worship and to sacrifice unto the Lord of hosts in Shiloh. And the sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, the priests of the Lord, were there.” People then went to Shiloh to worship. The Bible specifically tells us that the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, were there. They were wicked reprobates.

They were basically sons of Belial. Although they were in the priesthood, they certainly abused the priesthood. First Samuel 2:12 says, “Now the sons of Eli were sons of Belial.” They knew not the Lord. By the way, that is one of the problems that we have today. We have men in the pulpit who are proclaiming themselves to be men of God who know not the Lord. They are unsaved. Just like these boys were priests and knew not the Lord, they were sons of Belial.

Notice verse 13: “And the priest's custom with the people was that when any man offered sacrifice, the priest's servant came while the

flesh was in seething," or boiling, "with a flesh hook of three teeth in his hand." He struck it into the pan, or a kettle, or a cauldron, or a pot. All that the flesh hook brought up, the priest took for himself. So they did in Shiloh unto all the Israelites that came thither.

Also, before they burned the fat, the priest's servant came and said to the man that sacrificed, "Give flesh a roast for the priest, for he will not have sodden flesh of thee, but raw." If any man said unto him, "Let them not fail to burn the fat presently, then take as much as thy soul desireth," he would answer him, "Nay, but if thou give it me now, and if not, I will take it by force."

Wherefore, the sin of the young men was very great before the Lord. Watch the result: "for men abhorred," or hated, "the offering of the Lord." Thus their sin affected not only themselves but the people who came to worship.

To show their unfitness for office, Eli was very old and heard all that his sons did unto all Israel, and how they lay with women that assembled at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation. So they were committing fornication and adultery at the tabernacle. And he said unto them, "Why do you such things? For I hear of your evil dealings by all this people. Nay, my sons, for it is no good report that I hear. You make the Lord's people to transgress."

"If one man sin against another, the judge shall judge him. But if a man sin against the Lord, who shall entreat for him?" Notwithstanding, they hearken not to the voice of their father, because the Lord would slay them. So here then were wicked, wicked individuals who were in control of the sacrifices and the offerings of the Lord. They were not only fraudulent, they were not only fornicators, they were also corruptors of the people as well. They were in the priesthood, but they were wholly unfit for the office they held.

And yet, here they are in the priest's office. The interesting thing is that, in light of the corruption of the priesthood, Shiloh went then into idolatry. It was forsaken by the people because of all this corruption; the people went into idolatry.

Judges 18 verse 31 says: "And they set them up Michael's graven image which he had made all the time that the house of God was in

Shiloh." So here you have the children of Dan setting up a graven image all the time that the house of God was in Shiloh. The people then were forsaking the house of God because of corruption and wickedness, and they themselves were wicked as well.

Psalm 78 in verse 60 says, "So that he forsook the tabernacle of Shiloh, the tent which he placed among the children of men." The Bible tells us that God forsook not only the people because of their wickedness, but also His house there because of the corruption. God forsook His tent.

God's Judgment on Shiloh as a Warning

God forsook his house. You will remember that the prophet Jeremiah is known as the weeping prophet. The people despised Jeremiah. In fact, Jeremiah was mistreated over and over, thrown into a dungeon, and threatened with death. Let me show you why they hated Jeremiah. All this is connected to Shiloh.

In Jeremiah chapter 7, beginning with verse 12, God says through the prophet Jeremiah: "But go you now to my place which was in Shiloh, where I set my name at the first, and see what I did to it for the wickedness of my people Israel. And now because you have done all these works, saith the Lord, and I spake unto you, rising up early and speaking, but you heard not. And I called you, but you answered not. Therefore will I do unto this house, which is called by my name, wherein you trust, and unto the place which I gave you unto your fathers, as I have done to Shiloh. And I will cast you out of my sight, as I have cast out all your brethren, even the whole seed of Ephraim."

God said, "All right, you have built me a house." You remember that Solomon built the temple. And what did God say? "I'm going to do to this house exactly that which I did to Shiloh. And I'm going to judge you, I'm going to destroy you." In Jeremiah 26, verse 4, God says, "And thou shalt say unto them, Thus saith the Lord, If you will not hearken to Me to walk in My law, which I have set before you, to hearken to the words of My servants, the prophets, whom I sent unto you, both rising up early and sending them, but you hearken not, then I will make this house like Shiloh, and I will make this city a curse to all the nations of the earth." So God is threatening, under

the ministry of Jeremiah, to do to the temple and to the people exactly what He did to Shiloh and to the people in those particular times.

Psalm 78, beginning with verse 58 and reading through verse 64, shows why they were so upset with Jeremiah. It reveals the corruption not only of the priests, but of the people as well: “For they provoked him to anger with their high places, and moved him to jealousy with their graven images. When God heard this, he was wroth and greatly abhorred Israel. So that he forsook the tabernacle of Shiloh, the tent which he placed among men, and delivered His strength into captivity and His glory into the enemy's hand.” That is, He sent heathen to conquer His people. “He gave His people over also unto the sword, and was wroth with His inheritance. The fire consumed their young men, and their maidens were not given to marriage. Their priests fell by the sword, and their widows made no lamentation.”

I hope you understand why Jeremiah was so despised. Anytime a preacher begins to warn of judgment, death, and destruction, and that God is turning His hand against the people, he is certainly going to be despised and hated. God threatened to do to the temple exactly what He did to Shiloh. It is true that the people went into idolatry and forsook Shiloh. But it is equally true that God forsook Shiloh because of the people and their wickedness. The people’s idolatry and wickedness were the reason God forsook the place He had chosen.

Theological vs. Practical Presence of God

The title of this message is “The Disappearing God.” Theologically speaking, God cannot disappear, because God is omnipresent. When we speak of the omnipresence of God, we mean that God is everywhere at one time in the totality of His person. There is no place in which God is not. David understood this. In Psalm 139, a wonderful and beautiful psalm, he asks, “Whither shall I go from thy spirit? Or whither shall I flee from thy presence?”

“If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there. If I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there shall thy hand lead

me, and thy right hand shall hold me. If I say, Surely the darkness shall cover me, even the night shall be light about me. Yea, the darkness hideth not from thee, but the night shineth as the day. The darkness and the light are both alike unto thee."

So David is here talking about the omnipresence of God, that God is everywhere at one time in the totality of His person. Theologically speaking, God cannot disappear because He is omnipresent. But practically speaking, He may withdraw Himself, and the graciousness of His presence, and His blessings, and His mercies, so that we cannot find Him, and we cannot see Him, and we cannot reach Him.

Turn to the book of Hosea, chapter 5. As you are turning there, I want to quote another Scripture and tell you about it. If you were to read the Song of Solomon, you would find there that the Song of Solomon deals basically with the church and with the Divine Bridegroom, the Lord Jesus Christ. In the Song of Solomon, of course, the bridegroom is knocking at the door.

Biblical Examples of God Withdrawing

The bride is so concerned with herself that she does not immediately answer the knock. In the Song of Solomon, chapter 5, verse 6, the Bible says, "I opened to my beloved, but my beloved had withdrawn himself and was gone. My soul failed when he spake. I sought him, but I could not find him. I called him, but he gave no answer." What did she say? "I opened to my beloved, but he had withdrawn himself." Then she starts seeking for him, but she cannot find him.

In Hosea chapter 5 and verse 6, look what God says concerning Judah and His people: "They shall go with their flocks and with their herds to seek the Lord, but they shall not find Him. He hath withdrawn Himself from them." Isn't that amazing? He hath withdrawn Himself from them. Do you remember that passage in Isaiah 55 where it says, "Seek ye the Lord while He may be found, call ye upon Him while He is near"? In other words, there is a time when God cannot be found. There is a time when God is not near.

Isaiah 59, verses 1 and 2, helps us understand this: "Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened that it cannot save, neither His ear

heavy that it cannot hear, but your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid His face from you that He will not hear." The Lord's hand is not shortened that it cannot save. His ear is not heavy that it cannot hear. Surely God can hear. Surely God can save.

Why, then, is there such a chasm, such a gulf? He says, "Your iniquities have separated between you and your God and your sins have hid His face from you." What has God done? God has basically withdrawn Himself. God does that from time to time when we sin against Him. He withdraws His gracious presence from us. In 1 Samuel 28, Saul, King Saul, is seeking the Lord. But to understand 1 Samuel 28, we must remember 1 Samuel 15, where Saul refused to obey God. Samuel the prophet said, "You've rejected the word of the Lord, and He's rejected you from being king."

God was going to get someone else to rule over His people, a man after His own heart. When you get to 1 Samuel chapter 28, the Philistines have gathered together. Saul is seeking the Lord, but he cannot find Him. God does not answer his prayer, through the Urim and the Thummim, or in any way whatsoever.

And you know what happens? Saul then turns to a witch. He says, "Get me a diviner of spirits." Have you ever asked yourself why Saul could not find the Lord? Why would the Lord not answer Saul?

When you go to 2 Samuel chapter 7, God is entering into a covenant with David and promising to build David a house. God tells David that if his son sins, He will chastise him with chastisements. Then God says, "But I will not take my mercy away from Him as I did from Saul."

When God took His mercy away from Saul, it seemed as if God were deaf. Saul cried in vain, but God would not answer. He cried and cried. He tried and tried, but God would not answer. God would not hear him.

A good illustration of this is found in Judges chapter 6, in the life of Gideon. Watch what happens to Israel. Israel has sinned against God. Verse 3 says, "And so it was when Israel had sown, that the Midianites came up, and the Amalekites, and the children of the east, even they came up against them. And they encamped against

them, and destroyed the increase of the earth, till thou come into Gaza, and left no sustenance for Israel, neither sheep, nor oxen, nor ass." All the enemies had come in and devoured the land. Verse 5 continues: "For they came up with their cattle and their tents, and they came up as grasshoppers for multitude. For both they and their camels were without number, and they entered into the land to destroy it. And Israel was greatly impoverished because of the Midianites. And the children of Israel cried unto the LORD. And it came to pass, when the children of Israel cried unto the LORD because of the Midianites, that the LORD sent a prophet unto the children of Israel, and said unto them, Thus said the Lord God of Israel, I brought you up out of Egypt, and I brought you forth out of the"

The Lord reminded Israel, "I am the Lord your God, fear not the gods of the Amorites, and whose land you dwell," but they had not obeyed His voice. Then an angel of the Lord appeared to Gideon and said, "The Lord is with thee, thou mighty man of valor." Gideon answered, "O my Lord, if the Lord be with us, why then has all this befallen us? And where be all His miracles which our fathers told us of, saying, Did not the Lord bring thee up from Egypt? But now the Lord hath forsaken us, and delivered us into the hands of the Midianites."

When the angel said, "The Lord is with thee, thou mighty man of valor," Gideon essentially said, "Wait a minute. If God's with us, why are we in the mess that we're in? Why are we experiencing this? Why are our enemies triumphing over us? Why do they have dominion over us? Why are we being subjugated? If God, where are all of His miracles?" Until the time of Gideon, God was silent. God had withdrawn His mercies and His gracious presence. There were no demonstrations of His power, or of His miracles, and of His might. His enemies had control over His people. Gideon therefore rightly asked, "If the Lord be with us, why has all this befallen us? And where are all of His miracles?"

Most of you know that when you look at your Bible, you see the Old Testament and the New Testament. What many people do not understand is that between the book of Malachi and the book of Matthew there were four hundred years. Those four hundred years

between Malachi and Matthew are known as the four hundred silent years. God did not speak. God gave no revelation of Himself for four hundred years.

Someone may object, “Well, now wait a minute, Brother Weaver. Everything you’re trying to tell me is from the Old Testament.” The Old Testament is just as much the Word of God as the New Testament. We have one Bible, not two Bibles. Besides that, God is immutable. He is unchangeable. God does not change. The same truth is shown basically in the New Testament. If you would turn in your Bibles to the book of Revelation, chapter 2.

I want you to notice what our Lord said to the church of Laodicea. This is Revelation chapter 3, verse 14:

“And unto the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write, These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God. I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot. I would thou wert cold or hot. So then, because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew thee out of my mouth. Because thou sayest, I am rich and increased with goods, and have need of nothing. And knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked. I counsel thee to buy me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich in white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear, and anoint thine eyes with eye salve, that thou mayest see.”

Our Lord said to these Laodiceans, “You’re neither cold nor hot. You’re lukewarm. Therefore,” says God, “I’m going to spew you out of my mouth. I’m going to spit you out of my mouth.” And God said, “You do not know the fact that you are naked and wretched and blind and miserable.”

Do you think the Laodicean church was experiencing the presence of the power of God in their lives? Do you think that they were having their prayers answered on a daily basis? The answer is no. He was far away from such a wicked people. And he said, “Look, I counsel you, you better start listening to me. You better start buying of me instead of the world. You better make sure that you’re paying attention to my truth.”

Has God disappeared from your life? Has God disappeared from your family?

Have you seen any of His miracles lately? How frequently are your prayers answered? If God is not in your life, in your family, in your church, or in your nation, where did He go? How did He disappear?

Let us be honest. Is not the attitude of the American people today, even professing Christian people, the same as the attitude of those found in 1 Samuel 2:17, when they despised the worship of God? Why is this building not filled and overflowing with people? When a man teaches and preaches the Word of God, why are those buildings not filled? The answer is that people are not really interested in truth. They are not really interested in worshipping the Lord.

I understand the corruption of the priesthood in Hophni and Phinehas, and I understand corruption in the ministry today. Everywhere I go, I hear people say that they really want the Word of God. It may not be a great multitude, but many say, “We really want the Word of God, but we cannot find a pastor with the backbone and fortitude to stand up and preach and teach the Word of God.” Most people say, “We hear the same old drivel Sunday after Sunday.” The statement I hear most frequently is, “Preacher, we’re starving to death.” Many people really would love to hear the truth; they simply cannot find a pastor who will preach and teach it.

I understand the lack of leadership, direction, and teaching. However, some people do not want the truth. They prefer to have their ears tickled. Oddly enough, they believe their ignorance relieves them of responsibility. If they do not hear or know the truth, they think they are unaccountable for it and will not have to answer to God.

Moreover, some may find a pastor who will preach and teach the entire counsel of God, yet they will not support him, stand with him, or obey the Word of God. I have known many good men who had to leave churches, or were run off, because the people would not take the Word of God. They would not stomach it.

The point is this: We are today at the precise point in our history as Israel was in the days of Samuel.

The Scarcity of God's Word in Samuel's Day

What do I mean by that? First, we are at the point where, if God does not sovereignly and powerfully raise up men to preach and teach His Word, we are in deep trouble. We are in the midst of corruption and compromise, and in that midst God raised up Samuel.

Secondly, I want you to look at 1 Samuel chapter 3 and verse 1, because this begins to explain what the Bible means when it says, “And the Lord appeared again in Shiloh.” Here the Bible says, “And the child Samuel ministered unto the Lord before Eli. And the word of the Lord was precious in those days.”

There was no open vision. I want to deal with two or three things in verse 1. First of all, the Bible says, “And the word of the Lord was precious in those days.” The word precious refers to that which is costly, excellent, honorable, valuable, rare, splendid, and scarce. You know what makes a precious jewel precious? Scarcity. Rarity. The Word of God was precious in those days. The scarcer an object, the more valuable it is.

You know what God said in Amos 8 and verse 11? Just listen. “Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will send a famine in the land. Not a famine of bread, nor of thirst for water, but a famine of hearing the Word of God.” So why was the Word of God precious in those days? Because it was scarce. It was rare. Now, look at verse 1 again. “And the child Samuel ministered unto the Lord before Eli. And the word of the Lord was precious in those days. There was no open vision.” Hmm. It was so scarce.

There was no open vision. Now I have to ask the question: What does that mean? What does the Bible mean when it says there was no open vision? I want you to turn with me to several passages. The first one is Proverbs 29 and verse 18. Here is a verse that has been abused, misused, and misinterpreted. This verse has been the theme verse for many pastors, missionaries, and visionaries. This verse has been used to carry churches into debt slavery and Christian people into bondage. Let me tell you up front, this verse has absolutely nothing to do with dreams and visions. No. Listen to what Proverbs 29 verse 18 says: “Where there is no vision, the people perish.”

The Meaning of 'Vision' as Preaching

But he that keepeth the law, happy is he. I know that you have heard preachers say, “We need to have a vision. We need to have a thousand by next year. Or we need to have a larger building by next year. We need this church bond program because we need a vision.” When the Bible says, “Where there is no vision, people perish,” the word vision actually means the public proclamation of the Word of God, the public preaching and teaching of the Word of God. When the Bible says in 1 Samuel 3:1, “There was no open vision,” there was no open preaching and teaching. Proverbs 29:18 explains the latter part of the verse: “Where there is no vision,” that is, no public preaching and teaching, “the people perish. But, he that keepeth the law,” he that has that public preaching and teaching, “happy is he.” He has the Word of God there before him. Obviously, the vision here has to do with preaching.

This is how the word is used throughout the Bible. I realize that sometimes, when the word vision is used in the Bible, it refers to a real, literal vision, because God did speak that way occasionally to the prophets of old. But most of the time, when this word is used, it refers to preaching and teaching. Jeremiah 14:14 says, “Then the Lord said unto me, The prophets prophesy lies in my name.” “I sent them not, neither have I commanded them, neither spoken to them. They prophesy unto you a false vision.” Notice the word. They were preaching a false preaching, with divination, a thing of naught, and the deceit of the heart. In other words, God had not spoken to them; they were making their own message up.

Jeremiah 23:16 says, “Thus saith the Lord of hosts, Hearken not unto the words of the prophets that prophesy unto you. They make you vain. They speak a vision of their own heart and not out of the mouth of the Lord.” They were speaking a vision; they were preaching what they had dreamed up themselves. They were speaking publicly their own thoughts. They were not speaking the Word of God.

One other passage is Ezekiel 12:21–28. There, too, the meaning of vision is demonstrated in the context of what is publicly proclaimed.

In Ezekiel chapter 12, beginning with verse 21, we read: “And the word of the Lord came to me, saying, Son of man, what is that proverb that you have in the land of Israel, saying, The days are prolonged, and every vision faileth,” or every prophecy faileth? “Tell them therefore, Thus saith the Lord God, I will make this proverb to cease, and they shall no more use it as a proverb in Israel. But say to them, The days are at hand, and the effect of every vision,” that is, the result of every prophecy, “there shall be no more any vain vision,” vain preaching, “or flattering divination within the house of Israel. For I am the Lord, I will speak,” now watch, “and the word that I shall speak shall come to pass.”

“It shall be no more prolonged.” That was the vision they were saying was prolonged. “For in your days, O rebellious house, will I say the word, and will perform it, saith the Lord God. Again the word of the Lord came to me, saying, Son of man, behold, they of the house of Israel say, The vision that he seeth is for many days to come, and he prophesieth of times that are far off. Therefore say unto them, Thus saith the Lord God, There shall none of my words be prolonged any more, but the word which I have spoken shall be done, saith the Lord.” In this passage, every vision refers to the preaching of the Word of God.

I could take you throughout the entirety of the Bible and show you that over and over. But look in 1 Samuel 3 and verse 1: “And the child Samuel ministered unto the Lord before Eli. And the Word of the Lord was precious in those days.” There was no open vision.

Let me ask you a question. Do you think a preacher who is stealing, defrauding, committing adultery, fornication, and is unholy is going to really preach the Word of God? The answer is no. No wonder there is no open vision. There was no one there to preach and teach. Eli was old; in fact, Eli was about to die at ninety-eight years of age. So the Word of God was precious. There was no one there to preach and teach the Word of God.

SCRIPTURE READING - 1 Samuel 3:3-17 (KJV)

How could there be with the corruption of the priesthood? God had to raise up another prophet, and He did by the name of Samuel.

"And ere the lamp of God went out in the temple of the Lord, where the ark of God was, and Samuel was laid down to sleep, that the Lord called Samuel, and he answered, Here am I."

God Appears Again Through His Word

And he ran unto Eli, and said, "Here I am, for thou callest me." And he said, "I call not. Lie down again." And he went and lay down. And the Lord called again, "Samuel." And Samuel arose, and went to Eli, and said, "Here am I, for thou didst call me." And he answered, "I call not, my son. Lie down again." Now Samuel did not yet know the Lord. Now watch. Neither was the word of the Lord yet revealed unto him. And the Lord called Samuel again the third time. And he arose and went to Eli and said, "Here am I, for thou didst call me." And Eli perceived that the Lord had called the child. Therefore Eli said unto Samuel, "Go, lie down, and it shall be, if he call thee, that thou shalt say, Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth." So Samuel went and lay down in his place. And the LORD came and stood, and called, as he did at other times, "Samuel, Samuel." Then Samuel answered, "Speak, for thy servant heareth." And the LORD said to Samuel, "Behold, I will do a thing in Israel at which both the ears of every one that heareth it shall tingle."

And that day I will perform against Eli all things which I have spoken concerning his house. When I begin, I will also make an end. For I have told him, look, for I have told him that I will judge his house forever for the iniquity which he knoweth, because his sons made themselves vile and he restrained them not. And therefore I have sworn unto the house of Eli that the iniquity of Eli's house shall not be purged with sacrifice nor offering forever. And Samuel lay until the morning and opened the doors of the house of the Lord. And Samuel feared to show Eli the vision. What was the vision? It was the word of the Lord. Then Eli called Samuel and said, "Samuel, my son," and he answered, "Here am I." And he said, "What is the thing that the Lord hath said unto thee? I pray thee, hide it not from me. God do so to thee and more also if thou hide anything from me of all the things that he saith unto thee."

Samuel told Eli every wit; he hid nothing from him. Eli said, "It is the Lord. Let him do what seemeth him good." Samuel grew, and the Lord was with him, and did let none of his words fall to the ground. All Israel, from Dan to Beersheba, knew that Samuel was established be a prophet of the Lord. "And the Lord appeared again in Shiloh." How did the Lord appear again? He appeared again in and through and by means of His Word: "And the Lord appeared again in Shiloh, for the Lord revealed Himself to Samuel in Shiloh, by the Word of the Lord." Here was a man who would preach, proclaim, and teach the pure Word of God.

Application: Restoring God's Presence

Why has God disappeared from our lives, our families, our churches, and our nation? The answer is that His Word is not preached and proclaimed. It is not taught. It is not obeyed. Wherever God's Word is neglected, rejected, or despised, God always withdraws His gracious manifestation of His presence and His blessings.

It is only through the Word of God that we understand the righteousness as well as the judgment of God. The Apostle Paul, speaking in Romans 1:17-18, says, "For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith, as it is written, the just shall live by faith." Then he says, "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who hold the truth in unrighteousness." How can men turn from sin if they do not know what sin is? How can they repent if they do not know what repentance is? How can they turn to truth if they do not know what truth is? And how can they do any of that without the power and blessing of God?

Has God disappeared from your life? If you do not want God to disappear, you must not only read, study, and apply the Word of God; you must hear its preaching and teaching. The Bible tells us that through the foolishness of preaching God chose to save those that believe. Through the preaching and teaching of the Word of God, the saints are edified and built up in the most holy faith. Therefore, it is your responsibility to bring your life into conformity to the Word of God.

Deuteronomy 28 begins with the blessings of God: in the first fifteen verses, God says, “If you obey Me, all these blessings are going to fall upon you.” Beginning at verse 15, He starts with the curses that will fall upon you if you disobey the Word of God or refuse the Word of God. He tells you all the curses that will fall upon you if you disobey the Word of God, if you refuse the Word of God. When you come to verse 23, here is one of those curses. Listen carefully.

“And thy heaven that is over thy head shall be brass, and the earth that is under thee shall be iron.” What is God saying? “The heaven that is over thy head shall be brass.” He is saying, “I will not listen to you; I will not hear you. You refuse My Word; I will refuse to listen to you.” Theologically speaking, God cannot disappear. Practically speaking, however, He can withdraw the blessed manifestation of His presence, His miracles, His might, and His power. If we want God in our lives, His Word must have the preeminence in our lives. Let us pray.

Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we ask You for Your grace, mercy, and help. We pray, Lord, that Thou wouldst be kind and gracious to us, and that You would enable us to see the absolute necessity and the importance of Your Word. Give us grace, Lord, that we may serve Thee acceptably with reverence and godly fear. We pray Thy blessings upon Ian and Aga as we begin the ceremony, and ask that You prepare their hearts. In Christ's name we pray, Amen. I love you.

CHAPTER 21

Will it happen again?

SCRIPTURE READING - Ezekiel 9:1-11 (KJV)

Introduction: The Question of Repeated Judgment

Will it happen again?

Ezekiel 9, verse 1: "He cried also in mine ears with a loud voice, saying, Cause them that have charge of the city to draw near, even every man with his destroying weapon in his hand. Behold, six men came from the way of the higher gate, which lieth toward the north, and every man a slaughter weapon in his hand; and one man among them was clothed with linen, with a writer's inkhorn by his side."

"And they went in, and stood beside the brazen altar. And the glory of the God of Israel was gone up from the cherub, whereupon he was, to the threshold of the house. And he called to the man clothed with linen, which had the writer's inkhorn by his side; and the LORD said unto him, Go through the midst of the city, through the midst of Jerusalem, and set a mark upon the foreheads of the men that sigh and that cry for all the abominations that be done in the midst thereof. And to the

> others he said in mine hearing, Go ye after him through the city, and smite: let not your eye spare, neither have ye pity."
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> "Slay utterly old and young, both maids, and little children, and women: but come not near any man upon whom is the mark; and begin at my sanctuary. Then they began at the ancient men which were before the house. And he said unto them, Defile the house, and fill the courts with the slain: go ye forth. And they went forth, and slew in the city. And it came to pass, while they were slaying them, and I was left, that I fell upon my face, and cried, and said, Ah Lord GOD! wilt thou destroy all the residue of Israel in thy pouring out of thy fury upon Jerusalem? Then said he unto me, The iniquity of the house of Israel and Judah is exceeding great, and the land is full of blood, and the city full of perverseness: for they say, The LORD hath forsaken the earth, and the LORD seeth not."
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> "And as for me also, mine eye shall not spare, neither will I have pity, but I will recompense their way upon their head. And, behold, the man clothed with linen, which had the inkhorn by his side, reported the matter, saying, I have done as thou hast commanded me."
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> It has been repeatedly said that lightning does not strike twice in the same place. Of course, that's not true. Lightning will strike wherever and whenever the sovereign God sends it. If He decides it's to strike a hundred times in a certain place, then it's going to strike a hundred times in a certain place. It is the same with every weather-related judgment.

There are states like Kansas, Alabama, and a number of others, I'm sure, that have certain sections known as Tornado Alley, because tornadoes always go in that direction. It is the same with hurricanes and earthquakes. If someone survives a horrible hurricane, earthquake, or tornado, the question automatically arises in his mind: Will it happen again?

We could ask that question concerning all of God's judgments: Will they happen again? If we grasp the truth of God's immutability—that is, His unchangeableness—we do not have to ask that question, because He is still the same infinite, eternal,

immutable, holy, and righteous God that He always has been, and His judgments against sin and rebellion do not change. The circumstances surrounding the judgments may change, but the outcome and results of the judgments are the same.

The Call of the Destroyers (Ezekiel 9:1-2)

In Ezekiel chapter 9, God reveals to Ezekiel that He intends to destroy Judah and Jerusalem, and also all the wicked who proliferate those areas. In verse 1, we read: “He cried also in mine ears with a loud voice, saying, Cause them that have charge over the city to draw near, even every man with his destroying weapon in his hand.”

The loud voice, or great voice, is significant because it demonstrates the greatness of His indignation and the vehemence of His wrath, which had stirred Him against the sins of the people. Thus, God is calling together His messengers of death: “Cause them that have charge over the city to draw near, even every man with his destroying weapon in his hand.” Some scholars say that those who have charge over the city are the Chaldeans. Obviously, God had given the city into the hands of the Chaldeans.

This command is issued from the temple court. In fact, the latter part of verse 2 says, “And they went in, and stood beside the brazen altar.” The temple was where God revealed Himself to His people, either in mercy or in judgment. They stood beside the brazen altar.

Judah and Jerusalem had forsaken God’s substitutional sacrifice for their sins, and thus they became the sacrifice themselves. This biblical principle is taught throughout Scripture: You either have to have a substitutional sacrifice for your sins, or you pay the penalty for your sins yourself. Since the wicked in Judah and Jerusalem had forsaken God’s substitutional sacrifice, they now must be sacrificed to His holiness, righteousness, and justice.

No Mercy When Judgment Falls

When God sends His judgment, it is too late to beg for mercy. Joab was a murderer, the captain of David's host, a fierce warrior and great fighter; but he also murdered two men in cold blood. When

Solomon ascended to the throne, he sought to have Joab killed because of his murders. What did Joab do?

He ran into the tabernacle and grabbed hold of the horns of the brazen altar. In 1 Kings 2:28–31, the Bible says: "Then tidings came to Joab: for Joab had turned after Adonijah, though he turned not after Absalom. And Joab fled unto the tabernacle of the LORD, and caught hold on the horns of the altar. And it was told king Solomon that Joab was fled unto the tabernacle of the LORD; and, behold, he is by the altar. Then Solomon sent Benaiah the son of Jehoiada, saying, Go, fall upon him. And Benaiah came to the tabernacle of the LORD, and said unto him, Thus saith the king, Come forth."

"And he said, Nay; but I will die here. And Benaiah brought the king word again, saying, Thus said Joab, and thus he answered me. And the king said unto him, Do as he hath said, and fall upon him, and bury him; that thou mayest take away the innocent blood, which Joab shed, from me, and from the house of my father." Joab said, “I want to die holding on to the horns of the altar.” Solomon said, “Fine, that's exactly how you're going to die.” It is too late for mercy when judgment has fallen.

When He calls those who have charge over the city to draw near with their destroying weapons in their hands, the Bible says, "Behold, six men came from the way of the higher gate, which lieth toward the north, and every man a slaughter weapon in his hand; and one man among them was clothed with linen, with a writer's inkhorn by his side."

Identity of the Six Men: Angels or Babylonians?

"And they went in, and stood beside the brazen altar." Who were these six men who appeared with their destroying weapons in their hands?

Scholars are divided, and there are two different views. Adam Clarke says that the six men with destroying weapons represented the Babylonian army, because God had given the Babylonians charge to destroy Judah and Jerusalem. He wrote, "By those six men with destroying weapons, the Chaldeans are represented, who have received commission to destroy the city."

Clarke continues: "And when the north is mentioned in such cases, the Chaldean armies are generally intended. There appears to have been six men with a sort of slaughter bills and one man with an inkhorn. These may represent the seven counselors of the Eastern monarchs, who always saw the king's face and knew all the secrets of government. One of them was that minister who had the office of reporting concerning criminals, who carried the book of death and the book of life, where the names were entered of the criminals who were destined to suffer and of those who were either considered as innocent or recommended to mercy—those in the former in the book of death, those in the latter in the book of life. The person with the inkhorn might be termed, in our phrase, the recorder." Thus, Adam Clarke says these six representatives were Babylonian or Chaldean soldiers.

An interesting verse is found in Jeremiah 39, verse 3. It just so happens that six princes of Nebuchadnezzar are mentioned in the Bible: "And all the princes of the king of Babylon came in, and sat in the middle gate, even Nergal-sharezer, Samgar-nebo, Sarsechim, Rab-saris, Nergal-sharezer, Rab-mag, with all the residue of the princes of the king of Babylon." Here, six princes are specified in Scripture. Were these six men six Babylonians?

Scholars are divided. I frankly go with Matthew Henry and some of the others who say that these six indeed were angels, and not men in the strictest sense of the word. Every angel that ever appeared in the Bible appeared as a man. There are never any women angels, and certainly not any baby angels. Every angel in the Bible took on the form of a man.

When you consider that one angel in one night with one stroke of the sword killed 185,000 Assyrian soldiers, six angels ought not to have too much problem with Judah and Jerusalem. Matthew Henry says, "There are those that have charge over the city to destroy it, not the Chaldean armies that are employed to that work, but they're not the visitors. They're only the servants, or rather the tools. God's angels have received a charge now to lay that city waste, which they had long had a charge to protect and watch over. They are at hand as destroying angels, as ministers of wrath, for every man has his

destroying weapon in his hand, as the angel that kept the way of the tree of life with a flaming sword."

He continues: "They went in and stood by the brazen altar on which sacrifices were wont to be offered and atonement made. When they acted as destroyers, they acted as sacrificers, not from any personal revenge or ill will, but with a pure and sincere regard to the glory of God. For His justice, all they slew were offered up as victims. They stood by the altar as it were to protect and vindicate that, and plead its righteous cause, and avenge the hard profanation of it. At the altar they were to receive their commission to destroy, to intimate that the iniquity of Jerusalem, like that of Eli's house, was not to be purged by sacrifice."

Certainly Matthew Henry is correct. You will either offer a sacrifice acceptable to God, or you will become the sacrifice of His righteous justice and judgment. In Psalm 118, verse 27, the Scripture says, "God is the LORD, which hath shewed us light: bind the sacrifice with cords, even unto the horns of the altar."

God destroyed Judah and Jerusalem, and it was a very devastating destruction. Why did God deal so horrendously with Judah and Jerusalem? In Lamentations chapter 4, verse 6, Jeremiah wrote, "For the punishment of the iniquity of the daughter of my people is greater than the punishment of the sin of Sodom, that was overthrown as in a moment, and no hands stayed on her." The punishment of Judah and Jerusalem was greater than the punishment of Sodom and Gomorrah because the greatness of their sins lay in the greatness of their responsibilities and their opportunities. Therefore, the greater the opportunity and the greater the responsibility, the greater the culpability and thus the greater the punishment.

The Abominations That Provoked Judgment (Ezekiel 8)

When we reach chapter 9, God is intent on destroying Judah and Jerusalem. We must therefore ask: What led up to that? To answer, let us examine Ezekiel chapter 8 and see what provoked the Lord so horribly before we consider the questions in chapter 9. When we see those provocations, we certainly do not want to mimic them.

However, I am sincerely and genuinely afraid that most professing Christians are engaging in the same exact provocations. If we are engaging in them and continuing to do so, the question must be asked: Will it happen again? If you do not know what "it" is, hold on for a moment; let us look at the Scripture, and then we can understand what the question really means. Let us read the first five verses of Ezekiel chapter 8 together now.

Ezekiel records, "And it came to pass in the sixth year, in the sixth month, in the fifth day of the month, as I sat in mine house, and the elders of Judah sat before me, that the hand of the Lord GOD fell there upon me. Then I beheld, and lo a likeness as the appearance of fire: from the appearance of his loins even downward, fire; and from his loins even upward, as the appearance of brightness, as the colour of amber. And he put forth the form of an hand, and took me by a lock of mine head; and the spirit lifted me up between the earth and the heaven, and brought me in the visions of God to Jerusalem, to the door of the inner gate that looketh toward the north."

There was the seat of the image of jealousy, which provoketh to jealousy. The glory of the God of Israel was there, according to the vision that Ezekiel saw in the plain. God said, "Son of man, lift up thine eyes now the way toward the north." Ezekiel lifted up his eyes, and behold northward at the gate of the altar was this image of jealousy in the entry.

The very first thing we find is an altar at the gate. In these first five verses there is open, unabashed, and blatant idolatry contrary to God, His Word, and His worship. God states very clearly that there was the seat of the idol.

Ezekiel says this idol was certainly an abomination. He calls it the idol of jealousy and adds the participle, provoking God to jealousy. What idol was it? The Scripture does not say. It could have been an idol of Baal, which Manasseh had even at one time in the temple. It could also have been an idol of Adonis, Mars, or Tammuz, which we will find related in the Scripture a little later.

But the whole point is this: If the idol was sitting openly at the gate where everyone could see it, then obviously the entire country was given over to idolatry. The entire country had basically

apostatized from the Word of God. The idol was located at the door of the inner gate for all to see. They were absolutely unashamed in their idolatry and in their apostasy.

It just did not matter to them; it was simply something they did. That is bad enough, but it gets even worse. Look at Ezekiel chapter 8, beginning in verse 6: “Furthermore he said unto me, Son of man, seest thou what they do? even the great abominations that the house of Israel committeth here, that I should go far off from my sanctuary? but turn thee yet again, and thou shalt see greater abominations.” As bad as that idol was, there was something even worse.

Verse 7 continues: “And he brought me to the door of the court; and when I looked, behold a hole in the wall. Then said he unto me, Son of man, dig now in the wall: and when I had digged in the wall, behold a door. And he said unto me, Go in, and behold the wicked abominations that they do here. So I went in and saw; and behold every form of creeping things, and abominable beasts, and all the idols of the house of Israel, pourtrayed upon the wall round about. And there stood before them seventy men of the ancients of the house of Israel, and in the midst of them stood Jaazaniah the son of Shaphan, with every man his censer in his hand; and a thick cloud of incense went up.”

“Then said he unto me, Son of man, hast thou seen what the ancients of the house of Israel do in the dark, every man in the chambers of his imagery? for they say, The LORD seeth us not; the LORD hath forsaken the earth.” God is describing a greater abomination than the idol sitting in the gate.

Adam Clarke makes an interesting observation concerning the images portrayed upon the wall: “It is very likely that these images portrayed on the wall were the objects of Egyptian adoration: the ox, the ape, the dog, the crocodile, the ibis, the scarab or beetle, and various other things.” When reading this passage, think of the tombs of the pharaohs seen not only in pictures, but in documentaries as well.

It appears that these images were privately worshiped by the Sanhedrin, or the great Jewish council, consisting of seventy or

seventy-two persons, six chosen from every tribe as representatives of the people. The images were portrayed upon the wall, as those ancient idols are found on the walls of the tombs of the kings and nobles of Egypt. Here, then, were these men worshiping all the idols of Egypt.

But notice verse 12; this is the clincher: "Then said he unto me, Son of man, hast thou seen what the ancients of the house of Israel do in the dark?" Then He says, "Every man in the chambers of his imagery? for they say, The LORD seeth us not; the LORD hath forsaken the earth." A hole was dug into the wall, and a door was discovered. That door led to the chambers of a man's imagery. When you hear about the chambers of your imagery, think of your mind.

The word image is from imagination. You have the image, or the imagination, in your mind. These leaders were unwilling to say and do publicly what they said and did privately. They were gross and all-out hypocrites. Their profession did not match their lives. They professed to be the people of God and the leaders of God's people, yet they turned their backs upon God and His people. They professed one thing, then lived totally and completely differently in private than in public. By this, we can see the absolute hypocrisy of most politicians and governmental leaders. Just stop and think with me.

With the exception of Muslims and Jews, practically every politician claims or professes to be a Christian. Yet they pass laws contrary to God and His Word, eagerly and willingly, and then have the audacity to defend their actions on humanistic grounds. We must conclude that what a man says, how he lives, and how he conducts himself is what he really is. Proverbs 23:7 says, "For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he." Our Lord said it well in Matthew 7:20: "Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them."

It is bad to have an idol in the gate where everybody can see it, but it is worse when people are secretly idolatrous while professing to be the people of God, when in reality they are not. Now, we think that is bad, but it gets worse. Verse 13 says, "He said also unto me, Turn thee yet again, and thou shalt see greater abominations that they do."

Here is something even worse: “Then he brought me to the door of the gate of the LORD’s house which was toward the north; and, behold, there sat women weeping for Tammuz.” Women weeping for Tammuz? The women were sitting in the gate reserved for the king and the princes. They had no business being there anyhow.

Although you may think this has absolutely nothing to do with us today, it has very great impact on us today. Matthew Poole and Albert Barnes both comment on the worship of Tammuz. You may say, “I have never even heard of that.” It is all through the Bible and all through history.

Matthew Poole writes: “There sat women, contrary to the law, who came thither, led by their blindest, because the vilest and most impudent superstition, and waiting, expressed by sitting, ready to commit the most lewd wickedness as part of their obscene and beastly rites. Weeping, this is the only part which is specified of their irreligious religion, commemorating with tears an infamously lustful and unclean war monger, or votary, of Venus snatched from her by an unhappy moon by a boar. Say some, this weeping implied all the beastly rites of that idol.” Adonis was supposedly killed by a wild boar; he was the lover of Venus.

All of this had sexual implications: prostitution and everything associated with it. Albert Barnes ties everything together: "This was a revival of nature worship under another form. The death of Adonis symbolized the suspension of the productive powers of nature, which were in due time revived. Accordingly, the time of this festival was the summer solstice, when in the east nature seems to wither and die under the scorching heat of the sun, to burst forth again into life in the due season. At the same time, there was a connection between this and sun worship in that the decline of the sun and the decline of nature might be alike represented by the death of Adonis. The excitement attended upon these extravagances of alternate wailing and exaltation were in complete accordance with the character of nature worship, which for this reason was so popular in the East, especially with women, and led by inevitable consequences to unbridled license and excess. Such was in Ezekiel's day one of the most detestable forms of idolatry."

The worship of Tammuz involved not just weeping and wailing, but the reappearance of life, which gave way to sexual perversity, bestiality, and everything else. Instead of these women sitting in the gate, where they should not have been, weeping as Ezra and Daniel did over the national sins of the people, they wept over an idol or that which the idol represented.

We have exactly the same thing today in environmentalism. If you want to get in real trouble with environmentalists or with our federal government, harm or touch a baby eagle. But you may murder your own baby through aborticide, and there is no problem. Talk about a perversion of turning things upside down. Look at the trees, Mother Earth, and nature. All these things are afforded higher praise and recognition than the God who created everything.

I have seen a bumper sticker that said, "Trees have feelings too." I saw one bumper sticker that I did like: "It's all right to hug a tree as long as you're climbing it to get to your deer stand." But today women and even men will weep and wail over a stranded baby whale that dies.

And 90 million aborted babies mean nothing. Something is wrong somewhere. That is exactly what we are facing in Ezekiel chapters 8 and 9. Some of you probably read this recently. Within the last couple of months, one well-known feminist, whose name I did not write down but whose statement was on the internet, was pregnant with a baby boy. She had her baby aborted—her baby boy murdered—and here was her rationale.

She said, and I am quoting, “I was not going to bring another monster into the world. If it was a man, it was a monster.” In other words, it is all right to kill a baby because you do not like its sex, but do not touch a baby eagle or harm a baby whale. Paganism always exalts nature and not nature’s God. It is a strange thing indeed, as well as abominable, that many choose to serve an idol with tears and refuse to serve the one true and living God with joy and gladness of heart.

All these are abominations. God brings us to the final abomination in verse 16: “And he brought me into the inner court of the LORD's house, and, behold, at the door of the temple of the

LORD, between the porch and the altar, were about five and twenty men, with their backs toward the temple of the LORD, and their faces toward the east; and they worshipped the sun toward the east." Only the priests were allowed in the inner court. Notice that there were about 25 men there. David divided the priests into courses. Do you remember how many courses? Twenty-four.

Each course had a priest over it, and then there was the high priest who was over all. Twenty-four plus one is twenty-five. Here are twenty-five priests in the inner court with their faces toward the sun and their backs toward the west. Did you know God's altar was in the west? What they were doing was turning their backs upon God and worshiping the sun. Sun worship, or nature worship, has been one of the most flagrant idolatries condemned over and over in Scripture.

In Deuteronomy 17, God demands the death penalty for anyone who does this: "If there be found among you, within any of thy gates which the LORD thy God giveth thee, man or woman, that hath wrought wickedness in the sight of the LORD thy God, in transgressing his covenant, and hath gone and served other gods, and worshipped them, either the sun, or moon, or any of the host of heaven, which I have not commanded; and it be told thee, and thou hast heard of it, and enquired diligently, and, behold, it be true, and the thing certain, that such abomination is wrought in Israel: then shalt thou bring forth that man or that woman, which have committed that wicked thing, unto thy gates, even that man or that woman, and shalt stone them with stones, till they die."

So God demands the death penalty. Job 31, beginning with verse 26, records Job's defense. He believes that he is righteous and has not done anything to merit God's judgment upon him. But he says: "If I beheld the sun when it shined, or the moon walking in brightness; and my heart hath been secretly enticed, or my mouth hath kissed my hand: this also were an iniquity to be punished by the judge: for I should have denied the God that is above."

What is Job saying? If he worshiped the sun or the moon or anything like that, then basically what he had done was deny the God that is above.

When you get to Ezekiel chapter 8, what are they doing? They are turning their backs upon God and worshiping the sun. They are facing east instead of west. If that altar was at the gate, the people were involved in idolatry. The elders or the princes were involved in idolatry. The priests were involved in idolatry. What God is trying to tell us in Ezekiel chapter 8 is the same thing He tells us in Ezekiel 22: idolatry and apostasy had pervaded every aspect of society.

"There is a conspiracy of her prophets in the midst thereof, like a roaring lion ravening the prey; they have devoured souls; they have taken the treasure and precious things; they have made her many widows in the midst thereof."

"Her priests have violated my law, and have profaned mine holy things: they have put no difference between the holy and profane, neither have they shewed difference between the unclean and the clean, and have hid their eyes from my sabbaths, and I am profaned among them."

"Her princes in the midst thereof are like wolves ravening the prey, to shed blood, and to destroy souls, to get dishonest gain."

"And her prophets have daubed them with untempered morter, seeing vanity, and divining lies unto them, saying, Thus saith the Lord GOD, when the LORD hath not spoken."

"The people of the land have used oppression, and exercised robbery, and have vexed the poor and needy: yea, they have oppressed the stranger wrongfully."

So it does not matter if you are talking about the prophets, the priests, the princes, or the people. All have fallen prey to idolatry. Here is the conclusion that God comes to in Ezekiel 8: "Then he said unto me, Hast thou seen this, O son of man? Is it a light thing to the house of Judah that they commit the abominations which they commit here? for they have filled the land with violence, and have returned to provoke me to anger, and, lo, they put the branch to their nose. Therefore will I also deal in fury: mine eye shall not spare, neither will I have pity: and though they cry in mine ears with a loud voice, yet will I not hear them."

So God then calls for these six men with the destroying weapons. What does that mean? Judgment has come. Full judgment has come.

There is not going to be any mercy. There is not going to be any forgiveness. There is not going to be any repentance or any change of mind. It is here, and that is it.

The Marking of the Faithful and the Slaughter (Ezekiel 9:3-7)

Now, here is what God graciously and kindly does. He calls for this recorder to come in with his inkhorn and mark the foreheads of the men and women who genuinely and sincerely mourn for the corruption and the apostasy of the people. In Ezekiel 9, verse 3, the Bible says, “And the glory of the God of Israel was gone up from the cherub, whereupon he was, to the threshold of the house. And he called to the man clothed with linen, which had the writer's inkhorn by his side; and the LORD said unto him, Go through the midst of the city, through the midst of Jerusalem, and set a mark upon the foreheads of the men that sigh and that cry for all the abominations that be done in the midst thereof.” So God says, “Mark these few that sigh and cry for all this filthiness and all this wickedness.”

Mark them. Now, after they are marked, you have something very awesome, very terrible, very horrifying. It begins with verse 5. Ezekiel 9, verse 5: “And to the others he said in mine hearing, Go ye after him through the city, and smite: let not your eye spare, neither have ye pity: slay utterly old and young, both maids, and little children, and women: but come not near any man upon whom is the mark; and begin at my sanctuary. Then they began at the ancient men which were before the house.” Now, look at verse 7: “And he said unto them, Defile the house, and fill the courts with the slain: go ye forth. And they went forth, and slew in the city.”

Note what he said in verse 5: “Go ye after him through the city.” Verse 6: “Slay utterly old and young... and begin at my sanctuary. Then they began at the ancient men which were before the house,” that is, these elders who were in front of the temple. Then he said in verse 7, “Defile the house,” that is, the temple, “and fill the courts with the slain.” “Go ye forth. And they went forth, and slew in the city.” One thing that is very clearly taught here is this: God specifically tells us where His judgment began. He said in verse 6, “Slay utterly old and young, both maids, and little children, and

women: but come not near any man upon whom is the mark; and begin at my sanctuary." So they took care of the elders, the princes, the prophets, and the priests, and then they went throughout the city. Does that phrase, "and begin at my sanctuary," ring a bell in your mind? Well, it should.

Judgment Begins at the House of God (1 Peter 4:17-18)

First Peter 4:17 says, "For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God: and if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God?" Watch carefully. Verse 18 clarifies it: "And if the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?"

Go back to verse 17: "For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God." Exactly the way it did in Ezekiel 9. "And if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel?" Then he clarifies that in verse 18: "And if the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?" Hold First Peter, but go back in your Bibles to Ezekiel chapter 9. Think about this. He said, if it first begin with us, what is going to be the end of the ungodly? And if the righteous scarcely be saved, what is verse 8? "And it came to pass, while they were slaying them, and I was left, I fell upon my face."

I have news for you: if God is slaying everybody around and I am the only one left, I am going to fall on my face, do some worshipping, and thank God as well. Of course, Ezekiel was going to intercede for everybody else as well. Can you imagine? Here is what he is saying: if God would deal that way with His own professing people, what will He do to those who have absolutely no profession of Him whatsoever?

Here is the whole thought that prompted this message. I want you to think. I want you to pause. I want you to consider. I want you to contemplate upon this. We have been, historically, a professing Christian people, and our nation is a professing Christian nation. The truth, however, is that we have apostatized from that profession. We have turned our backs upon God, upon His law, and upon His Word.

Modern America's Parallel Sins

We look for what you and I would call an easy religion and a superficial salvation. The truth of the matter is that, if you look around at modern-day Christendom, we want to be saved from the penalty of our sins while we revel in, enjoy, and glory in our sins. We want to be entertained. We want to be coddled, comforted, and pampered.

We as a people have no desire to be holy, obedient, godly, or righteous. The truth is, as a nation, we have become unjust, unrighteous, and unholy in every sphere of life and every area of government. We have forsaken God and His Word socially, economically, ecclesiastically, governmentally, and individually. As a nation, we are in idolatry, rebellion, and sin up to our eyeballs. We are committing exactly the same sins that Judah and Jerusalem committed.

So my question is, will it happen again? You say, “Now wait a minute, Brother Weaver. I am not worshiping the sun, falling down before some idol of Tammuz, Adonis, Mars, or Baal. I am not an idolater.” Turn in your Bibles to Colossians chapter 3. Do you realize that you cannot violate any of the Ten Commandments until you have violated the first commandment, “Thou shalt have no other gods before me”? You cannot commit adultery without being an idolater. You cannot commit theft, blaspheme God, or dishonor your father and mother without being an idolater. Why? Because whatever you do that places yourself above God is idolatry.

Colossians 3, verse 5: “Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry: for which things' sake the wrath of God cometh on the children of disobedience.” Covetousness is idolatry. When we place our desires, lusts, and loves upon things instead of the Lord, it is idolatry. When we place material possessions ahead of worship and obedience to the Lord, it is idolatry. When we refuse to order our thoughts according to His Word, it is idolatry. When we place ourselves, our wants, and our desires ahead of Him, it is idolatry.

You say, “I will not bow down to an idol.” No, but you bow down to the idol of self. You want your will, your lust, and your flesh gratified, satisfied, pleased, and pampered. Self is an idol. We have become a people who want what we want and do not care what it takes or how we get it, just so we get it. That is idolatry—the idolatry that brings the judgment and wrath of God upon a people. That is why He says, “for which things' sake the wrath of God cometh on the children of disobedience.”

Will it happen again? Will God send His destroyers among us? Will God destroy our society, our nation, our people? God is immutable. God does not change, and neither do His judgments. We have to learn the truth of Hebrews 10, verse 31: "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God." And I've got news for you: it's even more fearful if that living God is angry with you. I don't want Him to be angry with me. So you have to ask yourself this question in light of Ezekiel 9, in light of 1 Peter chapter 4, since it began in the sanctuary of the Old Testament, and He said it's to begin in His house in the New Testament, will it happen again?

Applications

Applications and Warnings

God has ministers of wrath at His disposal. They are always at His beck and call. They are His angels, and they also have invisible powers by whom and through whom He accomplishes His purposes. Those who make God their enemy also make His avenging angels their enemies. If one angel can take out 185,000 in one night, with one stroke of the sword, I do not want any angels mad at me either. I do not have a Glock that can shoot that fast. And if it could, it would do no good against a spirit. They are spirit beings.

The truth of the matter is that it is absolutely insane to fight against God. You have to be stark, raving crazy when you understand that all He has to do is call, and they are at hand.

The second application is that we have committed exactly the same sin Israel of old committed. We are trusting in our founding fathers. The founding father of Israel was Abraham. When you stop and think about our founding fathers, most of them were Christians.

The few who were not Christians were deeply influenced by Christianity.

Benjamin Franklin is usually listed as a deist. I would encourage you to read some of his writings and notice all the use of Scripture that he gives. He may not have been a converted man, but even at the Constitutional Convention, it was Benjamin Franklin who called for prayer. He said, "If a sparrow cannot fall to the ground without your Heavenly Father, is it possible that a nation should rise without Him?" He implored that every session of their meeting be opened to prayer. That is why Congress is open to prayer to this day; that was where it started. Benjamin Franklin was a personal friend of George Whitefield and always went to hear Whitefield preach. Franklin calculated that Whitefield could be heard without any type of amplification while preaching to 25,000 people.

Yes, our founding fathers basically were Christian. Turn in your Bibles to Ezekiel chapter 33. Abraham was the only godly man, the friend of God, and Israel depended upon this. But look what God says: "Son of man, they that inhabit those wastes of the land of Israel speak, saying, Abraham was one, and he inherited the land: but we are many; the land is given us for inheritance." Abraham was a friend of God, and God gave him the land. But now they claimed it from Abraham because there were many of them. Watch verse 25. God says: "Wherefore say unto them, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Ye eat with the blood," which was condemned in Scripture, "and lift up your eyes toward your idols," which was condemned in Scripture, "and shed blood," which was condemned in Scripture, "and shall ye possess the land?"

I do not think so, says God. "Ye stand upon your sword, ye work abomination, and ye defile every one his neighbour's wife: and shall ye possess the land? Say thou thus unto them, Thus saith the Lord GOD; As I live, surely they that are in the wastes shall fall by the sword, and him that is in the open field will I give to the beasts to be devoured, and they that be in the forts and in the caves shall die of the pestilence." God says, no, you are not going to possess the land. He does not care who your father was. He does not care who your founder was. You violated everything, and you will be dispossessed. It is just that simple.

Now, one more. I want you to go back to Ezekiel chapter 8. I have already said this, but I want to show it to you one more time from Scripture. It is absolutely astounding. Do you understand that there comes a time when God will not hear the cries for mercy? It is a frightening truth revealed in Scripture. I can give you Scripture after Scripture; Proverbs chapter 1 is one of them. But we need go no further than Ezekiel chapter 8 and verse 18. God says: "Therefore will I also deal in fury."

That is because of the sins of the people: "Mine eye shall not spare, neither will I have pity: and though they cry in mine ears with a loud voice, yet will I not hear them."

Now what is God saying? God says there is coming a time when He will not hear. In Ezekiel 9:10, He says, “And as for me also, mine eye shall not spare, neither will I have pity, but I will recompense their way upon their head.” He will give them exactly what they deserve. If one does not call upon God in a time of grace and mercy, when God is near, it is too late to call upon Him in the time of judgment and justice.

He said in Isaiah 55:6–7, “Seek ye the LORD while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near: let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the LORD, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.” Notice when he says to seek the LORD: “while he may be found.” Call upon Him while He is near—in grace and mercy. It is too late to call upon Him when He is near in judgment and justice.

Conclusion: Prepare Your Heart

The question is, will it happen again? If you believe we are in a mess in this country, make sure your heart is right with the Lord and do whatever is necessary to prepare your life. I want to be like Ezekiel. If there is anybody left, I want to be among those who are left, and I want to fall on my face and say, “Thank you, Lord, for your mercy and your grace.”

When Ezra and Daniel were confessing their national sins, they said, “Lord, to thee belongeth righteousness, but unto us confusion

of faces, for we have rebelled and sinned against thee." They were saying, We are getting exactly what we deserve. You are right and holy, and whatever God does is right, holy, and righteous. God said, "I'm beginning at my sanctuary," and Peter said, "Judgment shall begin at the house of God."

We need to prepare our hearts for what inevitably lies ahead. Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we bow to Thee. We thank You for Your Word and truth. We ask for Your grace and mercy to be given to us. Help us, Lord, to prepare our hearts. We pray for our nation and people, that You would speak and show Yourself to them. How desperately we need Thee. How wickedly we turn our backs upon Thee and Thy Word and Thy law. O God, give us direction, wisdom, turning grace, and repenting grace. We pray in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

CHAPTER 22

The Present Truth

Introduction and Text

Right. 2 Peter chapter 1. 2 Peter chapter 1. And we're going to read verses 12 through 15. 2 Peter chapter 1. That's in the New Testament, sir. 2 Peter chapter 1. The title of the message today is "The Present Truth." The present truth. So 2 Peter chapter 1, verse 12, Peter writes, "Wherefore, I will not be negligent to put you always in remembrance of these things, though you know them and be established in the present truth. Yea, I think it meet, as long as I am in this tabernacle, to stir you up by putting you in remembrance, knowing that shortly I must put off this my tabernacle."

"Even as our Lord Jesus Christ has showed me. Moreover, I will endeavor that you may be able, after my decease, to have these things always in remembrance." I want to point out the fact that Peter instructs us on a very vital and important principle in verse 12. That principle is the present truth. Look at it again. "Wherefore, I will not be negligent to put you always in remembrance of these things, though you know them and be established in the present truth." Now, these things that he's putting the hearers in remembrance of are contained in verses 1 through 11. And he says

very obviously in verse 13, as long as I'm alive, I'm going to stir you up by putting these things in your remembrance. And verse 14, he tells why, because he knows he's going to die shortly. And then in verse 14, he says, "Knowing that shortly I must put off this my tabernacle, even as our Lord Jesus Christ has showed me." And then verse 15, he says, "I want you after my decease," that is after my death, "to have these things always in remembrance."

The Necessity of Repeated Truth

So when you go back, he says in verse 12 that he wants you to be established in the present truth. There's a wonderful point that has to be emphasized in several different ways at this particular time. First of all, we must understand that truth needs to be heard over and over. If you look at verse 12, Peter says, "I'm putting you in remembrance of these things, though you know them." So Peter was quite aware that his hearers already knew exactly what he was going to preach. So Peter was not about to neglect his duty of preaching just simply because they already knew these truths. He said, "Look, you may be grounded and settled in these truths and you may know how to live and apply these truths, but I'm still going to rehearse these truths in your ears." So rehearsing the truth makes us and forces us to continually analyze the truth and at the same time to reinforce that truth in our lives. It teaches us basically the truth of 2 Corinthians 13, verse 5.

Where the Apostle Paul says, "Examine yourselves, whether you be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?" he is saying, "Look, you have to prove your own self." Peter is telling us that truth needs to be heard over and over. Repetition aids learning. Peter knew that his hearers already knew this truth and were well instructed in it, yet he said, "I'm going to stir up your pure minds by putting you in remembrance of these things. And although you know this truth, and although you may be instructed in this truth, you need to hear it again and again." The fact that they knew the truth did not deter him from faithfully preaching and teaching what they already knew.

Here is the principle: The more you hear the truth, the more you understand the truth. People have told me, "I get more out of listening to your messages three or four times than just hearing them one time." That is obviously true, because the more you hear truth, the more you understand truth. A long time ago, I used to get upset when people did not understand everything I was preaching immediately. Then it dawned on me: how could they understand everything? I might spend forty hours studying a subject and then spend one hour teaching and preaching it. I have forty times more study in it than you do, so I am bound to understand more than you do in that sense. The more you hear the truth, the more you will understand it. You remember the song we sing: "Wonderful Words of Life, sing them o'er and o'er again to me, wonderful words of life." You never get tired of hearing those things.

Rehearing the same truth not only enables us to analyze our lives and bring them into greater conformity to that truth; it also keeps us from being forgetful and neglectful of it. The more you hear something, the more you hold it in your remembrance. Thirdly, Peter undoubtedly learned to teach from the master Teacher, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Mark chapter 10 and verse 1 says, “And he,” that is Christ, “arose from thence, and cometh into the coasts of Judaea by the farther side of Jordan. And the people resort unto him again; and, as he was wont, he taught them again.” The same people came to Christ again, and, as he was accustomed, he taught them again. In all probability, he taught them some of the same truths he had previously taught them.

The Danger of Letting Truth Slip

He understood who they were and what their needs were. So obviously, he taught them again. We must have the truth, and we must hear the truth repeatedly. Hebrews 2:1 says, “Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip.” Notice what he said: we should give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard. “Have heard” is past tense. You have heard these things in times past. You may have known them, and you may still know them

to some degree. But he said you had better give them more earnest heed, lest you should let them slip. The easiest thing in the world is to forget that which you have already heard and that which you have already been taught.

I have often laughed about this. I have said the average preacher has about two years' worth of sermons. When two years are over, he just starts repeating them over and over, and most people never realize it. In fact, some preachers could preach the same sermon the very next week, and most people would never know it, because they do not really listen anyhow. So we have to give the more earnest heed to these things that we have heard, lest we let them slip.

Now, in 2 Peter 1:12, the apostle Peter says, "Wherefore I will not be negligent to put you always in remembrance of these things, though ye know them, and be established in the present truth."

The Meaning of Being Established

The word "established" is the Greek word "sterizo," which literally means to be steadfast, to be fixed, to be constant, to be confirmed, to be made firm, and to be established in one's mind. Peter is saying that he wants these things firmly established in your mind. It is God's will that we be established in truth. Colossians 2, verse 7, says: "Rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, as you have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving." We are to be rooted and grounded in Jesus Christ, established in the faith as we have been taught, and abounding therein with thanksgiving. It is God's will that we be established in the faith.

There are specific benefits to being established in the faith. In Psalm 112, he is talking about the righteous man and the blessings that attend this righteous man who happens to be established in truth. "Praise ye the Lord. Blessed is the man that feareth the Lord, that delighteth greatly in his commandments." He already fears the Lord and delights in His commandments; he is established in the truth in that sense of the word.

"His seed shall be mighty upon the earth. The generation of the upright shall be blessed. Wealth and riches shall be in his house, and his righteousness endureth forever. Unto the upright there ariseth

light in the darkness. He is gracious and full of compassion and righteousness. A good man showeth favor and lendeth. He will guide his affairs with discretion. Surely he shall not be moved forever. The righteous shall be in everlasting remembrance. He shall not be afraid of evil tidings. His heart is fixed, trusting in the Lord. His heart is established. He shall not be afraid until he sees desire upon his enemies. He is dispersed. He hath given to the poor. His righteousness endureth forever. His horn shall be exalted with honor. The wicked shall see and be grieved. He shall gnash with his teeth and melt away. The desire of the wicked shall perish."

Here is the man that fears the Lord, delights greatly in His commandments, and is established in truth. His seed shall be great.

Wealth and riches shall be in his house. There will be light in darkness for him. His heart is fixed. He will not be afraid of evil tidings. His heart is established. His righteousness endures forever. I'd say those are pretty good blessings just from being established in the faith.

The opposite of being established in the faith is being double-minded or double-hearted. The Bible discusses a double-minded man in the book of James, chapter 1. Beginning with verse 5, it says, "If any man lack wisdom, let him ask of God, who giveth it to all men liberally, and upbraideth not. But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering."

"For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea, driven with wind and tossed. For let not that man think that he shall receive anything of the Lord. A double-minded man is unstable in all his ways." So instead of being established, you are unstable. There are certain benefits and blessings to being established in the faith.

If you look back to 2 Peter chapter 1 and verse 12, Peter wants his hearers to be established. But he also wants them established in the present truth. He says, "Wherefore, I will not be negligent to put you always in remembrance of these things, though you know them, and be established in the present truth." So you have to ask, what is the present truth? It is God's will that you be established in it.

What Present Truth Is Not

The word “present” is the Greek word “pareimi,” and literally means that which is at hand or to be present. The present truth is that truth which is right in front of you.

This word is used in two other passages of Scripture so that you will understand how it is being used here. In Luke chapter 13 and verse 1, Jesus was told, “There were present,” the same word, “pareimi,” “at that season, some that told him of the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices.” These individuals were standing in front of Jesus Christ, telling him about this incident, in which Pilate murdered individuals who were sacrificing and blended their blood in with their sacrifices. Notice that they were present at that season. What does that mean?

It means those people who were telling Christ were standing right in front of Him, talking to Him. They were at His hand; they were right there. They were present.

Look in your Bibles to 2 Corinthians 10:11. Paul uses the same word, “pareimi”: “Let such an one think this, that such as we are in word by letters when we are absent, such will be also indeed when we are present.”

When Paul says this, he means that when he is standing right in front of them, he will be exactly as he is when absent, writing letters. Whether standing before them, preaching, teaching, and talking to them, or away writing to them, he will not be different. The word “present,” then, simply means to be at hand, to be by, to be present, or, as stated, to be right in front of you.

The Present Truth

Peter, in 2 Peter chapter 1, wanted his hearers to be well fixed, well established, and constant in the present truth. They were not only to understand that truth but also to apply and live it. I want to begin by telling you what I do not mean by the phrase “the present truth,” and then I will tell you what I do mean.

I do not mean that truth is relative or that it changes with situations, conditions, circumstances, or the progression or erosion

of society. God's law does not change. His definition of sin does not change, nor does His definition of righteousness. What was sin in the first century is still sin in the twenty-first century. What was holy, righteous, and godly in the first century is still holy, righteous, and godly in the twenty-first century.

Just because, as that old cigarette commercial stated, "You've come a long way, baby," that does not mean we can take what is sinful, wicked, ungodly, and rebellious and somehow turn it around and make it lawful, honest, and good. No. God's definition of sin has not changed, and God's definition of righteousness has not changed.

Neither am I talking about situation ethics. Situation ethics would reason like this: Adultery is wrong, but if you happen to be in China, where people are poor and need money, and there is a working woman whom you can help by having sex with her and giving her money so that she can support her family, then it is supposedly all right. No, it is not all right. That is situation ethics; it is still fornication, still adultery, and still sin.

The Bible says in Psalm 119:89, "Forever, O Lord, is thy word settled in the heavens." That is well fixed and well established. Our Lord said in John 17:17, "Sanctify them by thy truth. Thy word is true." Therefore, when I use the phrase "the present truth," I am not talking about truth being relative, nor am I referring to situation ethics.

Secondly, I am not saying that there is such a thing as new truth. The phrase "the present truth" does not mean or imply a new truth. Listen carefully: If a revelation is new, it is not truth, for there is no new truth. Let me show you.

Hebrews 1:1–3 shows that there is no new revelation and no new truth: "God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets." In the Old Testament, and sometimes in the New Testament before it was completed, God spoke through dreams, trances, and different means. But this same God "hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds; who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he

had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high."

For anyone to believe in new truth or new revelation, he must deny that Jesus Christ is the full and final truth. The so-called new revelations people receive today are pure blasphemy, because they deny that Jesus Christ is the full and final revelation of God and that we have the completed Word of God. If you understand this, you will also understand that there is no need today for visions, dreams, horoscopes, astrological forecasters, charts, false prophets, fake and spurious writings, or anything else that people elevate above the Word of God or above the Word of Jesus Christ. It is blasphemous to say, "I know God sent His Son, Jesus Christ, and I know God gave us the Bible, but fifty years ago there was another revelation, and we have discovered this."

That is blasphemy: a denial of the perfection of Jesus Christ and of the perfection of the Word of God. Therefore, when I speak of the present truth, I am not talking about situation ethics. I am not saying that truth is relative, nor that there is new truth. Even Solomon said, "There is no new thing under the sun." I am not talking about additional revelations. What, then, do I mean when I use the term "the present truth"?

Progressive Unfolding of Truth

When God gave us His Word, He did not simply dump all the truth of it upon us at one time. Think about this: this book was written over a period of 1,600 years by 40 different authors. What does that teach you? It teaches us that there was a progressive unfolding of truth, or, at that time, a progressive unfolding of revelation.

The principle is found in Isaiah 28:9–10: “Whom shall he teach knowledge and whom shall he make understand doctrine? Them that are weaned from the milk and drawn from the breasts. For precept must be upon precept. Precept upon precept, line upon line, line upon line, here a little, there a little.” That is exactly how God gave us truth: precept upon precept, line upon line, here a little, there a little.

Consider the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ. Do you understand that the truth of the Messiah was unfolded slowly and progressively? In Genesis 3:15, you have the Protevangelium, the first promise of the Messiah. The Bible says there would be war between the seed of the serpent and the seed of the woman; the seed of the woman would bruise the serpent's head, and the serpent would bruise his heel. Bruising the heel is not a death blow, but bruising the head is a death blow.

Thus, in Genesis 3:15, the first things you find about the Messiah are that He would be born of a woman and that He would be victorious, destroying His enemy. But that is all you have about the Messiah in Genesis 3:15. It was later, in Genesis 12:1–3, that we learned the Messiah would come through the seed of Abraham.

"Indeed, shall all nations be blessed." Later, in Genesis 49, verse 10, it is revealed that He is going to be born of the tribe of Judah. So you went from Genesis 3:15, the seed of woman, to the seed of Abraham, to the tribe of Judah. When you get to 2 Samuel chapter 7, verses 12 through 13, you find that the Messiah is going to be the seed of David. After you find out He is going to be the seed of David, in Isaiah 7:14 you find out He is going to be born of a virgin. Finally, in Micah chapter 5 and verse 2, you find out that the Messiah is going to be born in Bethlehem of Judea.

What God did in Genesis 3:15 was reveal a little truth. Then, in Genesis 12, a little more truth; in Genesis 49, a little more truth; in 2 Samuel 7, a little more truth; and in Isaiah 7:14, a little more truth. Then, in Micah 5, verse 2, more truth. There was a progressive unfolding of the truth. God did not dump everything about the Messiah at one time, nor did He dump everything about the truth of the Scriptures upon us at one time. At each stage, there was a progressive unfolding of the truth.

If you understand this, Genesis 3:15 would have been a present truth. Genesis 12 would have been a present truth. Genesis 49 would have been a present truth. Second Samuel 7 would have been a present truth, because it was truth that had just been revealed. The same was true of Isaiah 7:14 and Micah 5, verse 2.

Now look at an illustration of this in the New Testament. Hold 2 Peter 1, but turn to Acts chapter 18. Begin reading with verse 24. Here is Apollos, a mighty preacher and a great orator. Acts chapter 18, verse 24: "And a certain Jew named Apollos, born in Alexandria, an eloquent man and mighty in the Scriptures, came to Ephesus. This man was instructed in the way of the Lord, and being fervent in spirit, he spake and taught diligently the things of the Lord, knowing only the baptism of John." In other words, he had not heard anything and did not know anything since John the Baptist. Watch verse 26: "And he began to speak boldly in the synagogue," that is, that which he did know. "And when Aquila and Priscilla had heard, they took him unto them, and expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly."

“And when he was disposed to pass unto Achaia, the brethren wrote exhorting disciples to receive him, who, when he was come, helped them much who had believed through grace. And he mightily convinced the Jews of that publicly, showing by the scriptures that Jesus was the Christ.” So here’s Apollos, who was a great preacher and a great orator, but the only thing he knew was up to John the Baptist. The Bible had not been completed at that time. There was no internet. There was no telephone system. There was nothing.

Aquila and Priscilla were friends of Paul, and Paul had taught them. When they heard Apollos preach, they said, “You need to come visit with us a little while. Whatever you heard of John is true. There has been more that has taken place. John didn’t just point out the Messiah. He didn’t just baptize the Messiah. The Messiah has come. He’s done all these mighty works. He was crucified. He was buried. He’s raised from the dead. He’s ascended. He’s seated at the right hand of God the Father.” So they expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly. They taught him the present truth. That is that which God had revealed up at that particular time.

In Acts 19, we find another illustration of the present truth. “And it came to pass that while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul, having passed through the upper coast, came to Ephesus and finding certain disciples. And he said to them, ‘Have you received the Holy Ghost since or when you believed?’ And they said unto him, ‘We’ve not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost.’” He asked, “Unto

what then were you baptized?" They said, "Unto John's baptism." Paul explained, "John verily baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying unto the people that they should believe on him which should come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus." When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. These believers knew only John's baptism and what John taught. Paul brought them up to speed, teaching them the present truth. There is a present truth because there was a progressive unfolding of the truth in the scripture.

Illumination vs. Revelation

Here is another illustration. You will remember Peter in Acts 10, staying in the house of Simon the Tanner by the sea. Cornelius, a Roman soldier, had been told by God, "Send a chopper to the house of Simon the Tanner and tell Peter to come over here. He needs to preach to you." Remember, this was a Roman soldier. Peter would have eaten dinner, but while they were fixing it, they were late.

So Peter went up to the housetop to pray and fell into a trance. Three times God let down from heaven a sheet full of all kind of animals and said, "Rise and eat." But Peter said, "Not so, Lord. I've never eaten anything common or unclean in my life." Each time God said, "What I have cleansed, do not call thou common." After seeing the vision three times, Peter was pondering what it meant. About that time, there was a knock on the door.

Here were these men from Cornelius, and the Holy Spirit made Peter go. He took several of the men and went with them. When he got to Cornelius, what did he say? "You know how that it is unlawful for a man that is a Jew to enter into the house of someone who is unclean." But he said, "God has showed me." He went in and preached to Cornelius, and Cornelius and his whole house believed. When Peter was rebuked for doing this in Acts chapter 11, he explained it. When they heard what God had done in verse 18, those men said, "Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life."

So there was a present truth in that particular time. God was revealing this truth progressively.

Now, let me say this. Since Jesus Christ has come, since the Bible is complete, there is no more progressive revelation. In fact, there is no more revelation, period. Stop and think about this. If you try to tell me there is some additional revelation yet to come, what you are trying to tell me is that there is something above and greater and far beyond Jesus Christ and the Word of God. That is blasphemy. Do you think God would dishonor His Son by putting Him down and saying, "Well, there is going to be something greater than Jesus Christ"? No. Revelation has ceased.

I am going to explain this just for a moment. Listen carefully. Just because revelation has ceased does not mean that there is not a present truth. Revelation is a supernatural act of God whereby God reveals truth never known before to the human mind.

If I were to ask you who wrote the first five books of the Bible, the answer would be Moses. What is in the first three chapters of the book of Genesis? Creation. How did Moses know what happened in creation? He was not there. He was not born until a long time after that. The answer is that God revealed it to him. That is revelation. Revelation is the act of God whereby He reveals truth never known before to the human mind. This is why I am saying there is no more revelation.

But you say, "Look, if there is no more revelation, there cannot be any more present truth." That is not true. Why? Because although there is no more progressive revelation or progressive unfolding of the truth, there is illumination: a progressive enlightening or illuminating of our minds to that which has already been revealed. Illumination is the act of God, the Holy Spirit, whereby He guides us, enlightens us, and illuminates our minds so that we can understand that which has already been revealed. There is a progressive unfolding of the truth in illumination.

We use terms wrongly. We become excited about what we find in the Bible and say, “Let me share with you what God just revealed to me.” God did not just reveal anything to you. It was already revealed in the Bible. What God did was illuminate your mind and lighten your mind so that you could understand what was in the Bible. The correct way to say it would be, “Let me share with you what God

illuminated in my mind, or enlightened my mind, or gave me understanding in." That would be the correct way to say it.

Consider progressive illumination in Mark chapter 4, verses 33 and 34: "And with many such parables spake he the word unto them as they were able to hear it." How did our Lord teach? He gave them truth as they were able to hear it. He did not dump everything on them at one time. He just gave them truth as they were able to hear it. The next verse says, "But without a parable spake he not unto them."

"And when they were alone, he expounded all things to his disciples." If you really want to understand the Scriptures, you need to get along with Jesus Christ, because He is the author of the Scriptures and can explain to you exactly what He is talking about, exactly what He said, and exactly what He means.

Here is illumination. If I were to walk over to the wall and turn the light switch off, the room would be dark. Flip the light switch up, and the lights come on; I have then illuminated the room. The lights are on. So what God does in illumination is turn the lights on in your mind. In John 16, verse 12, speaking of the Holy Spirit, Jesus said, "I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now."

You are not able to receive them. Remember, He spake the word as they were able to hear it. "Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth. For he shall not speak of himself, but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak, and he will show you things to come. He shall glorify me, for he shall receive of mine, and he shall show it unto you." It is the ministry of the Holy Spirit to enlighten our minds, to illuminate our minds, and guide us into understanding the revealed truth of Scripture.

Only God can open the mind. Read Luke 24: "Then opened he their mind so that they might understand," or, "then opened he their understanding." Suppose I am trying to teach Steve something. I have it all worked out; it is clear and clean. I have my illustrations and my Scriptures, and I explain everything to him. When I finish, Steve just shakes his head. Would I look at him angrily and say, "What's wrong with you, dummy? Can't you see this? What are you, dumb or something?"

Why would I get angry with him if I understand that God is just as sovereign in illumination as he is in salvation? I do not care how great a teacher I am or how clear my illustrations are. If God does not open his mind, he will never see what I am trying to teach him. So why would I get angry and upset with him? Why would I not be patient with him?

Do you think that I learned what I learned in twenty-four hours? The answer is no. Did you learn what you learned in twenty-four hours? The answer is no. Some of you took years to come to the positions you are in now, yet we expect everybody else to take our same position in fifteen minutes. It does not work like that.

Steve has the responsibility to study. Paul told Timothy in 2 Timothy 2:7, "Consider what I say, and the Lord give thee understanding in all things." Understanding is the gift of God, but Steve has a responsibility to consider. That is why Paul says in 2 Timothy 2:15, "Study to show yourselves approved unto God, a workman that need not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth."

God did not dump all of His truth on us at one time. When God enables us to understand, He does not give us understanding of all truth at one time. There is no man who understands all truth, and certainly no man who understands all truth at one time. It does not work like that. Just as there was a progressive unfolding of truth in revelation, there is a progressive enlightening of truth in illumination. One of the problems we have as Christians is that we have never really learned, and are not accustomed to receiving truth as the present truth.

Historical Examples of Present Truth

Look back to 2 Peter 1 and notice verse 12. Peter says, "Wherefore, I will not be negligent to put you always in remembrance of these things." In other words, if he does not re-preach these things to them, he will be negligent. He says, "Though you know them," and he knows they know them, but he wants them to be established in the present truth.

Think about this. Most Christians—I am talking about real Christians—are comfortable with their knowledge of salvation. They are comfortable with their knowledge of creation. They may be comfortable and well-grounded in a few other points, but most professing Christians are not well-grounded and well-established in the present truth. To demonstrate that, consider how little emphasis is placed on the preaching and teaching of the Word of God in the average church. Think about that, because I am going to show you what the present truth is momentarily.

We attach almost no importance to the amount of study, preparation, and prayer that goes into preparing a message. I could probably count on one hand the individuals who have asked me—usually preachers or someone preparing for the ministry—"How long did it take you to prepare that message?"

Consider this: I am going to preach some messages in the not-too-distant future for which I have already spent weeks preparing, and I have only two prepared so far. I was going to have three, but it will probably turn out to be four. I have not counted how many hours I have invested in these studies, but I can tell you it is more than a day—more than a couple of days.

We do not usually think about these things, and consequently we place no real importance upon preaching or upon viewing preaching as the present truth. How you view preaching really depends on whether or not you understand the present truth.

Let me give you some historical examples. If you had been alive in the first century, during the cult of emperor worship in the Roman Empire, the present truth would have been the lordship of Jesus Christ. You would either serve and worship Christ or Caesar. You would have to choose: either stand with Jesus Christ and say, with those Christians, "Jesus Christ is Lord," or remain with the Roman emperor and his cult and say that Caesar is lord.

The point is that there is always a practical application to the present truth. If you had been alive in Germany in the 1500s, especially during the earlier part of that century, the present truth would have been justification by faith alone. You would either side with Martin Luther and the Reformers, affirming that you are

justified by faith alone, or side with the Roman Catholic Church and say that you are saved by your works.

Once you see a present truth, you have to make application of it. If you were alive in France or Geneva, Switzerland, in the 1500s, especially toward the middle of that era, the present truth would be the sovereignty of God. You would either join Calvin and the Reformers, or hold to a humanistic position of the divine right of kings.

If you were alive in Scotland during the middle of the 1500s, the present truth would be the kingship of Jesus Christ. You would either stand with John Knox and the Reformers, or hold to a statist position, saying that the state has the right to rule over the church. If you were alive in England in the 1700s, the present truth would be the purity of the church. You would either stand with the Puritans who wanted to purify the church, or with the established church that wanted to keep the status quo. Later, since most Puritans were unable to purify the church, they became separatists and separated from the established church because of its corruption. You would either desire pure worship as a separatist, or remain in the church for the status quo.

There was a present truth in each of these times. When you get to 2015, once again, the present truth involves the Lordship of Jesus Christ and the superiority of His Word. You will either serve, worship, and obey Christ in the Bible, or follow the humanists in sodomy, fornication, adultery, aborticide, and social and governmental sins such as socialism, Marxism, communism, and progressivism. There is a present truth today: the lordship of Christ and the superiority of His Word.

Ascertaining the Present Truth Today

Martin Luther's words reveal this present truth: "If I profess with the loudest voice and clearest exposition every portion of the truth of God except precisely that little point which the world and the devil are at that moment attacking, I am not confessing Christ. However boldly I may be professing Christ. Where the battle rages, there the loyalty of the soldier is proved. And to be steady on the battlefields besides his mere flight and disgrace if he flinches at that point."

So what did he say? You could explain, expound, and profess Christ and all the truths of the Bible, but if you neglect to stand in that one area where the battle is raging, then you have effectively denied Jesus Christ. Where is the battle raging today? We need to examine it.

How do we ascertain the present truth? Peter said, “I want you to be established in the present truth.” What was present back then is not necessarily present right now, although it is present in the sense that it is the Word of God. But, as Luther said, it is that area being attacked right now. My first answer is this: present truth is the truth from God’s Word that is under attack by the humanists, the liberals, and the unbelievers.

All you have to do is look around and see where the attacks are directed. That is where you are to stand your ground. One of the areas under attack right now is the Confederate battle flag. You may say that has nothing to do with Scripture, but I beg to differ with you. The Confederate battle flag is a Christian battle flag. It bears the cross of St. Andrew.

It has always been historically associated with resistance to tyranny and despotism. It had nothing to do with slavery. The attack is not only against that flag, but also against Southern culture and Southern history, which historically have been Christian. I am not saying everything in our culture is Christian, or that everything we have ever done in the South is Christian. But historically it has been Christian because, even during the war of Northern aggression, when the North went into Unitarianism and Transcendentalism, they labeled the South the Bible Belt.

That was not a compliment; it was meant as a derogatory term because they viewed us as backward and stupid because we believed the Bible. Then look at how the enemy is attacking: a sodomite wanted to sue the Bible publisher to take the statement that sodomy was a sin out of the Bible. Sodomy is still sin. The Bible is still right. We cannot say that aborticide is right.

I don't care how legal Congress makes it or the Supreme Court. It's not. It's murder. I'm simply saying, look around where the battle is raging. That's where we ascertain the present truth.

Secondly, the present truth is that which is being proclaimed by God's men from God's Word as necessity is laid upon them in the providence of God. And mind you, when I say God's men, I'm not talking about mama-called and papa-sent, ear-tickling preachers, but real, genuine men of God.

The present truth is that which is being proclaimed by God's men from God's word as necessity is laid upon them in the providence of God. Titus 1:1–3 says: "Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ, according to the faith of God's elect, and according to the truth which is after godliness. Now watch, in hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began."

If God promised eternal life before the world began, to whom did he promise it? Of course, he promised it to Jesus Christ, who is our federal head and representative, and he promised it to us who are in Christ. How do we know what God promised? Verse 3 says: "But hath in due times manifested his word through preaching which is committed unto me according to the commandment of God our Savior." How did God manifest his word? The Bible says it is through preaching.

I'm not discouraging you from studying your Bible. You should study it every day. But you will learn more from preaching than you ever will from private study if the man is expounding the Word of God. Why? Because he gave some pastor-teachers for the edifying, for the building up of the body of Christ. That's why God gave us.

You know what the Bible says in Amos 3 and verse 7? "Surely, the Lord God will do nothing, but he revealed his secrets to his servants, the prophets." What is God saying? God is saying, "I'm going to burden my men. I'm going to tell them what to preach and when to preach."

Let me give you an illustration. I recently came from Virginia, where I attended a chaplain's conference. There were a number of preachers, along with many other people. I was the first speaker, followed by five or six others. When I was invited to preach, I instantly knew what I had to preach. I preached the message I preached here, “When God Has Had Enough.” It was a message of judgment. The next day, did you know that the next five preachers

brought messages on the judgment of God? We had not talked to one another. I did not know what they were going to preach, and they did not know what I was going to preach.

Surely, “the Lord GOD will do nothing, but he revealeth his secret unto his servants the prophets.” The Bible says, “In the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.” Now you have six good and godly men preaching on the judgment of God. I think the average person, especially one who heard that, should be scratching his head and saying, “Is God trying to tell me something?”

When I say that the present truth can be ascertained through the preaching of God's men from God's Word, when necessities are laid upon them in the providence of God, I am not talking about the opinions of men. I am not talking about someone saying, “Well, I think,” “in my opinion,” or “I believe.” I am talking about preaching, and I will tell you what preaching is.

Receiving Preaching as God’s Word

In Nehemiah chapter 8, verses 7 and 8, the Levites caused the people to understand the law, and the people stood in their place. “So they read in the book in the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading.” What is preaching? It is exposition, explanation, and application. As long as there is exposition from the Word of God, explanation from the Word of God, and application from the Word of God, it is not the opinions of men; it is the Word of God. God gives it to His people for their benefit, blessing, and warning. What do most people do? They refuse it and reject it. I have probably told you this, but I am going to tell you again because it is a perfect illustration of what I am trying to share with you.

When I was in boot camp at Fort Jackson, South Carolina, I went into breakfast one morning. They woke us at five, and we had breakfast by six after standing in formation. I walked into the chow hall, and they threw this stuff in front of me: two pieces of white bread with cream beef over it.

I never will forget looking at that. I was raised on a farm. We had fresh eggs; mother made biscuits and gravy, grits, potatoes, and

meat. We called it cream beef on toast, but soldiers never called it that, I can assure you. I said, “I am not going to eat that slop. That is the most unappetizing stuff I have ever seen in my life. I refuse it.” And I did. I walked out of that chow hall.

Little did I know that they had planned a five-mile hike with full field packs. About nine o’clock, that creamed beef on toast seemed mighty appetizing to me. I thought, “You know, I was stupid. I should have eaten that stuff.” Unhappily, at boot camp, they do not come to your bunk and say, “What would you like for breakfast this morning? We’re taking orders.” They already know what they are going to do for that day and that week. The menus are laid out, probably based upon the activities. They already knew we were going to have a five-mile hike with full field packs.

If you have ever been to Fort Jackson, South Carolina, there is a lot of sand. They knew we needed that protein, and I turned my nose up at it. I was the one who suffered; I did without. You do not get to choose what God burdens the preacher to bring. Sometimes I have been asked to deal with certain subjects, and I have no problem doing so as long as there is no specific burden on my heart in a certain area. But you do not get to choose. God knows exactly what you need, and He knows exactly what I need. He sets before you that which He wants you to have.

That is the present truth. He already knows the tests, trials, tribulations, and tasks you are facing for that week, and He says, “Here is your creamed beef on toast.” You say, “I do not like it.” That does not matter. You had better eat it, because God has put it there for you. I have had people tell me, “I do not like your preaching on that subject.” Well, I am sorry.

You need to take that up with the Lord, you know. Yet you have to understand that God is in charge, not us. I'd like to always preach happy-go-lucky, feeling sermons, but it doesn't work like that. That's not reality, and that's not always truth. I can't always preach with a big, broad grin and smile on my face. I'm sorry. Some things are sober and some things are not. Really, you can't smile about it.

I want to show you something from Jeremiah, chapter 3, verses 14 and 15. God says, "Turn, O backsliding children, saith the LORD. For

I am married unto you, that as you repent, you turn, you come back to Me. And I will take you, one of a city and two of a family, and I will bring you to Zion."

Now what will God do to these people who repent and whom He's going to bless? He says, "And I will give you pastors according to my heart, which shall feed you with knowledge and understanding." I'll give you what? Pastors according to my heart that will feed you with knowledge and understanding. What will He give them? He will give them pastors according to His heart, pastors who will feed them with knowledge and understanding. So here's my question: Are you comfortable with that which you know? Are you established in the present truth? Do you even know what the present truth is? Or do you even know, really and truly, what you think you know?

What you need to understand is this: Each expositional message from the Word of God is a present truth each time you hear it. The present truth today would be the present truth. Do you understand that? Whatever is being expounded, explained, and applied from the Word of God, that is the present truth for you. God sets it before us. What did He say? "I'll give you a pastor according to my heart who will feed you with knowledge and understanding."

Secondly, you have to ask this: What is your attitude toward the preaching of the Word of God? What is your attitude toward the preached Word of God? Is it ho-hum?

Or is it, “Well, let’s hurry up and get this thing over with”? Or is your attitude, “Ha! Well, that’s just his opinion”? Really? Look at 1 Thessalonians 2 and verse 13. Here is what Paul told the Thessalonians: “For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because when ye received the word of God, which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of man, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe.” When you heard Paul, Barnabas, Silas, or Peter preach, did you say, “That’s what Paul thinks,” or, “That’s what Barnabas says”? No. Paul said they received the messages not as the word of men, but as they are in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh in those that believe. So how do you receive the preaching? Is it the word of men, or is it the word of God?

If you view it as the Word of God, you will say, “Here is the present truth for me: what God is telling me about how to live, honor Him, worship Him, and bring my life into greater conformity to His Word.” Peter said, “I want you to be established in the present truth.” When God gives us His Word and illuminates our minds, we need to remain constant, fixed, and established in that truth.

Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we ask for Your help, direction, and blessing. Lord, we desperately need Thy Word and truth and to be established in it. Give us grace that we may serve Thee acceptably with reverence and godly fear. In Thy name we pray. Amen.

CHAPTER 23

Secession Made Plain And Simple

Introduction: Secession as a Biblical Doctrine

Our text is in 2 Chronicles chapter 11, beginning at verse 13 and continuing through verse 17.

I was reading the Scripture after a friend asked me, since I have preached on secession a number of times, to put my messages in a booklet so that it could be distributed and everybody could understand the issue. I was thinking, Where in the world would I start? I have at least four messages: one on the principle of secession; one called “Treason Was Not Secession”; and two recently called “A Model for Secession.” I happened to be reading through 2 Chronicles, and this passage jumped out at me. I thought, This will be an interesting place to start so that everyone can really begin. So, “Secession Made Plain and Simple,” and I want you to see it in 2 Chronicles chapter 11, beginning with verse 13.

“And the priests and the Levites that were in all Israel resorted to him out of all their coasts. For the Levites left their suburbs and their

possession, and came to Judah and Jerusalem: for Jeroboam and his sons had cast them off from executing the priest's office unto the Lord. And he ordained him priests for the high places, and for the devils, and for the calves which he had made. And after them, out of all the tribes of Israel, such as set their hearts to seek the Lord God of Israel, came to Jerusalem to sacrifice unto the Lord God of their fathers. So they strengthened the kingdom of Judah, and made Rehoboam the son of Solomon strong three years: for three years they walked in the way of David and Solomon."

Years ago I made a statement that has basically made the rounds.

It concerns the doctrine of predestination. Everyone who believes the Bible has to believe something about predestination, because it is very clearly taught and mentioned in Scripture. Really and truly, everyone believes in predestination. There is no disagreement that there is such a thing as predestination. The only disagreement is who does the predestinating. Man has no problem with the doctrine as long as he is in control and doing the predestinating. As long as he can play God, he is absolutely happy with the doctrine. Once you begin to study Scripture, however, you say, No, man is not in control. God is in control, and God does the predestinating. Since God is eternal, He did the predestinating before the foundation of the world. All of a sudden, men begin to howl and scream, and they do not like that doctrine at all.

The same is true concerning the doctrine of secession. Secession is a doctrine because it is plainly and clearly taught in the Bible. You must believe something about it because it is in the Word of God. If you do not believe something about it, then, in essence, you are simply denying the Word of God. We wish to allow secession for ourselves, but sometimes we want to deny it for other people. If we secede, it is acceptable; but if others secede and that secession affects us adversely, then it is not acceptable. We are against it. So, like the doctrine of predestination, it all boils down to who secedes and who controls the secession.

Secession is nothing more than the act of seceding or withdrawing. It is a personal, religious, vocational, political, and even ecclesiastical act. Likewise, there are many reasons to secede and many causes of secession. One may secede from many things

without violating Scripture. In fact, there are places in the Word of God where we are commanded to secede.

Biblical Commands to Secede

In Proverbs chapter 1, beginning with verse 10, God says, "My son, if sinners entice thee, consent thou not. If they say, Come with us, let us lay wait for blood, let us lurk privily for the innocent without cause: let us swallow them up alive as the grave, and whole, as those that go down into the pit: we shall find all precious substance. We shall fill our houses with spoil: cast in thy lot among us; let us all have one purse." Now watch verse 15: "My son, walk not thou in the way with them"—that is, withdraw yourself, secede—"refrain thy foot from their path"—don't go with them, secede—"for their feet run to evil, and make haste to shed blood. Surely in vain the net is spread in the sight of any bird. And they lay wait for their own blood; they lurk privily for their own lives." So God says right here that we are to secede from those who do evil and commit evil. We are not to go with them, but to withdraw our foot from them.

In 2 Thessalonians chapter 3, verse 6, the Apostle Paul makes this exceedingly clear, and it is a command: "Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves"—or secede—"from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us." There are certain individuals from whom we are to secede or withdraw.

In 1 Timothy chapter 6, beginning with verse 3, the Apostle says, "If any man teach otherwise, and consent not to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness; he is proud, knowing nothing, but doting about questions and strifes of words, whereof cometh envy, strife, railings, evil surmisings, perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds, and destitute of the truth, supposing that gain is godliness: from such"—secede or—"withdraw thyself."

We must have a personal secession. Secession is very clearly taught in 2 Corinthians 6:14-18: "Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that

believeth with an infidel? And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Wherefore come out from among them"—that is, secede, withdraw—"and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty."

Secession as a God-Given Right and Act of Liberty

There are plenty of passages in the Bible that very clearly teach secession. That is why I said secession is a doctrine. You have to believe something about it. Who advocates secession, or claims secession as a personal, religious, vocational, ecclesiastical, and constitutional right given by God Himself? One may secede based upon conscience, commandment, despotism, tyranny, preference, or a host of other reasons according to the Word of God.

Let me say this very clearly: secession is a right. I will even go further and say secession is a God-given right. It is an act of liberty, freedom, and independence. If secession is not a right, if secession is not a God-given right, there is no such thing as liberty and freedom.

If I am not free to leave or secede from a situation, circumstance, or institution, then I am a slave. If I am not free to leave, I am a slave. It is just that simple. The same is true in reference to government. If the colonists did not have the right to secede or withdraw from England in 1776, then in reality they were slaves to George III and slaves to the British Parliament.

The Declaration of Independence begins: “The unanimous Declaration of the thirteen united States of America, When in the Course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another, and to assume among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the Laws of Nature and of Nature’s God entitle them…”

When it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the bands, what are they saying? When it becomes necessary for one people to

secede, to withdraw, then it becomes necessary for them to issue a decent respect to the opinions of mankind that requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation.

The Declaration of Independence is nothing more than a list of causes which caused the colonists to secede. The second paragraph states: “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.—That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men…” Governments do not give rights; God ordained them to secure those rights.

The Declaration continues: “…deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed,—That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness.”

Thus, the second paragraph says that it is the duty, the right, and the obligation of a people to secede and withdraw from a wicked, tyrannical, despotic government and begin a government of their own.

It is important for us to understand that the colonists did not seek to overthrow the government of George III or control Parliament. They seceded. That is, they left the established government in order that they might establish a new government. Secession is not revolution. Secession does not seek to overthrow a government; it seeks to separate and begin a new government.

You say, "Ah, but pastor, in the war of 1861–1865, when the South seceded, there was a war." That is true. But the war was not on the part of the South. It was Abraham Lincoln and the Radical Republicans that raised 75,000 troops to invade the South. The South seceded legally and peacefully. It did not seek a revolution or seek to overthrow Washington, D.C. It did not seek to overthrow the power structure that was in place. All the South wanted to do was to leave the confederation of the states and begin a new government.

Secession Illustrated in the Family and in Israel's History

We can find an excellent example of secession when we consider the family. Here is a young man who has been raised to honor and obey his father and mother. Finally, when he becomes a man, he seeks and finds the girl of his dreams. He marries her and leaves home. What he has just done, basically, is secede; he has withdrawn. He did not seek to overthrow his parents, deny their authority, destroy the girl's parents, or deny their authority. No. They withdrew from their families and began a new family—in another way of saying it, they began a new government, where the young man, the husband, is now the head of this new home under the Lord Jesus Christ.

That is secession, plain and simple. We see it happening before our faces every day, yet we never think of it as a peaceful, nonviolent withdrawal in order to form a new government. It is just that simple. In our text today, there are several illustrations of secession, and I am going to show you, first of all, the context.

Return in your Bibles to 2 Chronicles chapter 10. You would also find this account in 1 Kings chapters 11 and 12; in fact, we will look at chapter 12 later. Solomon is dead, and Rehoboam, his son, has taken over the throne. The people come to Rehoboam and say, “Look, your father made our tasks onerous; the taxes were too high. If you lighten our burden, we will serve thee.”

They were not seeking to overthrow Rehoboam. They were not seeking to withdraw or secede at that time. All they wanted was a righteous answer to their demands. Rehoboam says, “Give me three days and then come back.” He looks at the old men who grew up with his father and asks, “What do you advise?” The old men answer, “If you will be the servant to these people, they will be your servants forever.” The word “servant” there is ebed in the Hebrew. They told Rehoboam, in effect, that if he would be the slave to the people, the people would be his slaves forever.

In other words, it is reciprocal: you be their servant, and they are going to be your servants. But he did not listen to the old men. He turned instead to the young men who had grown up with him. They said, “You tell those rascals that your little finger is going to be

thicker than your father's loins. You tell them he laid heavy burdens on them, but you are going to add to their burdens. You tell them that he whipped them with whips, he chastened them with whips, but you are going to chasten them with scorpions."

Rehoboam listened to the young men. In 2 Chronicles 10:12-16 we read: "So Jeroboam and all the people came to Rehoboam on the third day, as the king bade, saying, Come again to me on the third day. And the king answered them roughly; and king Rehoboam forsook the counsel of the old men, and answered them after the advice of the young men, saying, My father made your yoke heavy, but I will add thereto: my father chastised you with whips, but I will chastise you with scorpions. So the king hearkened not unto the people: for the cause was of God, that the LORD might perform his word, which he spake by the hand of Ahijah the Shilonite to Jeroboam the son of Nebat. And when all Israel saw that the king would not hearken unto them, the people answered the king, saying, What portion have we in David? and we have none inheritance in the son of Jesse: every man to your tents, O Israel: and now, David, see to thine own house. So all Israel went to their tents."

Call to mind the second paragraph of the Declaration of Independence, and read verse 16 in this way: "And when all the colonists saw that George III would not hearken unto them, the people answered the king, George III, saying, What portion have we in England? What portion have we in Parliament? Every man to your tents, O Americans. And now, George III, see to thine own house. So all the colonists went to their homes." Do you see how exactly the second paragraph parallels what is being said in Scripture?

It was despotism and tyranny, plain and simple, that caused the colonists to secede from England. And it was tyranny and despotism, plain and simple, that caused Israel to secede from the Davidic Kingdom.

Rehoboam was indeed the son of Solomon and the grandson of David. He had the proper lineage, but he did not have the sense and understanding that David and Solomon had. One commentator observed that Solomon had all kinds of wives and concubines—700 wives or 300 wives and 700 concubines; the numbers are uncertain—and that, out of all of this, Solomon had only one son,

Rehoboam. Solomon had only one son, and he was a fool. Obviously, that is true.

Jeroboam's Idolatrous State Religion and Forced Worship

Jeroboam certainly did not know how to deal with people. He was chosen to be the head of the Northern Kingdom, and I want you to see the opportunity he had. Jeroboam had an opportunity to begin a new government under the laws of God. Why was God judging and destroying the kingdom under Solomon? Because of Solomon's rebellion and sin. Rehoboam continued in some of that, and so God gave Jeroboam a wonderful promise.

We read in 1 Kings 11:26: "And Jeroboam the son of Nebat, an Ephrathite of Zereda, Solomon's servant, whose mother's name was Zeruah, a widow woman, even he lifted up his hand against the king." Really? Why? "And this was the cause that he lifted up his hand against the king: Solomon built Millo, and repaired the breaches of the city of David his father. And the man Jeroboam was a mighty man of valor: and Solomon seeing the young man that he was industrious, he made him ruler over all the charge of the house of Joseph. And it came to pass at that time when Jeroboam went out of Jerusalem, that the prophet Ahijah the Shilonite found him in the way; and he had clad himself with a new garment; and they two were alone in the field: and Ahijah caught the new garment that was on him, and rent it in twelve pieces."

What would you think if you got a new coat, were walking in the field, and a stranger came up to you, snatched the coat off you, and tore it in twelve pieces? It certainly got Jeroboam's attention. Verse 30 says, "And Ahijah caught the new garment that was on him, and rent it in twelve pieces: and he said to Jeroboam, Take thee ten pieces: for thus saith the LORD, the God of Israel, Behold, I will rend the kingdom out of the hand of Solomon, and will give ten tribes to thee: (but he shall have one tribe for my servant David's sake, and for Jerusalem's sake, the city which I have chosen out of all the tribes of Israel:) because that they have forsaken me, and have worshipped Ashtoreth the goddess of the Zidonians, Chemosh the god of the Moabites, and Milcom the god of the children of Ammon, and have

not walked in my ways, to do that which is right in mine eyes, and to keep my statutes and my judgments, as did David his father."

"Howbeit I will not take the whole kingdom out of his hand: but I will make him prince all the days of his life for David my servant's sake, whom I chose, because he kept my commandments and my statutes: but I will take the kingdom out of his son's hand"—that would be Rehoboam—"and will give it unto thee, even ten tribes. And unto his son will I give one tribe, that David my servant may have a light alway before me in Jerusalem, the city which I have chosen me to put my name there. And I will take thee, and thou shalt reign according to all that thy soul desireth, and shalt be king over Israel. And it shall be, if thou wilt hearken unto all that I command thee, and wilt walk in my ways, and do that is right in my sight, to keep my statutes and my commandments, as David my servant did; that I will be with thee, and build thee a sure house, as I built for David, and will give Israel unto thee. And I will for this afflict the seed of David, but not for ever."

Solomon sought to kill Jeroboam because of this promise, so Jeroboam fled to Egypt. They called him back after Solomon died, when they were confronting Rehoboam. Jeroboam therefore had a unique opportunity to begin a new government with the blessings of God upon it. It is true that God told David He would build him a house, but it is equally true that He told Jeroboam, "I will build you a sure house. I will make sure that you have a house as long as you obey me."

Unhappily, Jeroboam had no intention of obeying the one true and living God. He began his new kingdom and government not only with idolatry, but with forced idolatry, forcing the people to worship his false gods. In 1 Kings 12:26 we read: "And Jeroboam said in his heart, Now shall the kingdom return to the house of David: if this people go up to do sacrifice in the house of the LORD at Jerusalem, then shall the heart of this people turn again unto their lord, even unto Rehoboam king of Judah, and they shall kill me, and go again to Rehoboam king of Judah. Whereupon the king took counsel."

This was no accident or happenstance. It was done deliberately and premeditatedly. "Whereupon the king took counsel, and made two calves of gold, and said unto them"—to the people—"It is too

much for you to go up to Jerusalem: behold thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt. And he set the one in Bethel, and the other put he in Dan. And this thing became a sin: for the people went to worship before the one, even unto Dan. And he made an house of high places, and made priests of the lowest of the people, which were not of the sons of Levi. And Jeroboam ordained a feast in the eighth month, on the fifteenth day of the month, like unto the feast that is in Judah, and he offered upon the altar. So did he in Bethel, sacrificing unto the calves that he had made: and he placed in Bethel the priests of the high places which he had made. So he offered upon the altar which he had made in Bethel the fifteenth day of the eighth month, even in the month which he had devised of his own heart; and ordained a feast unto the children of Israel: and he offered upon the altar, and burnt incense."

Here he is deliberately beginning his kingdom with idolatry. This is not only an instance of governmental tyranny and despotism; it is also an instance of religious tyranny and despotism. Jeroboam was beginning a state religion, or a governmental religion. He not only had political correctness; he also had religious correctness. Political correctness and religious correctness are synonymous. The religion of political correctness is a religion because it comes from the government.

Now let me make this exceedingly plain for you. Amos was from the southern kingdom, but he was sent by God into the northern kingdom to prophesy against King Jeroboam II. This is not the same Jeroboam mentioned in 1 Kings 11 and 12; this is Jeroboam II, another king. He was sent there to preach against him and his wickedness, because Jeroboam the second and all the kings who followed Jeroboam the first continued the calf worship.

Amos was up there preaching against Jeroboam and the calves. Here is what Amos was prophesying: "And the LORD said unto me, Amos, what seest thou? And I said, A plumbline. Then said the Lord, Behold, I will set a plumbline in the midst of my people Israel: I will not again pass by them any more: and the high places of Isaac shall be desolate, and the sanctuaries of Israel shall be laid waste; and I will rise against the house of Jeroboam with the sword." In other words, I am going to kill Jeroboam.

Then Amaziah the priest of Bethel—remember, Jeroboam had Bethel and Dan as places of worship—sent to Jeroboam king of Israel, saying, "Amos hath conspired against thee in the midst of the house of Israel: the land is not able to bear all his words. For thus Amos saith, Jeroboam shall die by the sword, and Israel shall surely be led away captive out of their own land. Also Amaziah said unto Amos, O thou seer, go, flee thee away into the land of Judah, and there eat bread, and prophesy there."

This is where the golden calves were. Amaziah was a state priest, a state preacher, and a state prophet—the priest of the king. In good South Georgia lingo, what Amaziah said to Amos was: "Boy, you better get out of here and go home if you want some bread, if you want to live. Go back where you came from."

"We'll either put you in prison or we'll kill you. Get out of here." That is what Amaziah told Amos. Look again at verse 12: "Also Amaziah said unto Amos, O thou seer, go, flee thee away into the land of Judah"—go back where you came—"and there eat bread, and prophesy there: but prophesy not again any more at Bethel: for it is the king's chapel, and it is the king's court." It is the king's chapel and the king's court—one and the same. Political correctness is religious correctness. Just as Rehoboam made secession absolutely necessary, so Jeroboam made secession absolutely necessary.

Vocational and Political Secession: The Example of the Priests and Levites

It is impossible to worship without real liberty and freedom. It is impossible to function without real liberty and freedom. In 2 Chronicles 11, verses 13 through 15, the background makes the passage clear: "And the priests and the Levites that were in all Israel resorted to him"—that is, to Rehoboam—"out of all their coasts. For the Levites left their suburbs and their possession, and came to Judah and Jerusalem: for Jeroboam and his sons had cast them off from executing the priest's office unto the LORD: and he ordained him priests for the high places, and for the devils, and for the calves which he had made."

There is a vocational and political secession. The priests and Levites were descendants of Aaron and were the Lord's priests; the

Levitical family was from Levi, as was Aaron. Jeroboam built golden calves and began his new state religion. He said, in effect, “I am not going to have these priests and Levites here. You are not working here anymore. This is no longer your vocation.” According to 1 Kings chapter 12, he appointed the lowest of the people to be his own priests. He cast the Lord’s priests off, and they seceded, withdrew, and went to Judah and Jerusalem, where the Temple was located. Their first allegiance was to the Lord and to His ministry.

They refused to bow to political correctness or to serve as priests of Jeroboam’s golden calves. Their secession was real, and it cost them. Withdrawal was very, very expensive, for “the Levites left their suburbs and their possession, and came to Judah and Jerusalem.”

SCRIPTURE READING - Numbers 35:1-8 (KJV)

> “And the LORD spake unto Moses in the plains of Moab by Jordan near Jericho, saying, Command the children of Israel, that they give unto the Levites of the inheritance of their possession cities to dwell in; and ye shall give also unto the Levites suburbs for the cities round about them. And the cities shall they have to dwell in; and the suburbs of them shall be for their cattle, and for their goods, and for all their beasts. And the suburbs of the cities, which ye shall give unto the Levites, shall reach from the wall of the city and outward a thousand cubits round about. And ye shall measure from without the city on the east side two thousand cubits, and on the south side two thousand cubits, and on the west side two thousand cubits, and on the north side two thousand cubits; and the city shall be in the midst: this shall be to them the suburbs of the cities. And among the cities which ye shall give unto the Levites there shall be six cities for refuge, which ye shall appoint for the manslayer, that he may flee thither: and to them ye shall add forty and two cities. So all the cities which ye shall give to the Levites shall be forty and eight cities: them shall ye give with their suburbs. And the cities which ye shall give shall be of the possession of the children of Israel: from them that have many ye shall give many; but from them that have few ye shall give few: every one shall give of his cities unto the Levites according to his inheritance which he inheriteth.”

> The Northern Kingdom was larger than the Southern Kingdom. So the Levites had more property in the northern kingdom than they did in the southern kingdom. So they are now kicked out of their inheritance. They are now losing their cities, their homes, their fields, their pastures. They're losing everything. So they are forsaking all of that; they were withdrawing from all of their material possessions and whatever they could take with them in order to serve the Lord.

They seceded from the government of Jeroboam and from the worship of the calves. Let me point out the fact that there are many people today who are seceding vocationally as well as politically. Many have left their trained vocations in order to go back to the land and to a simple way of life. They are absolutely fed up with the rat race, materialism, regulations, and the bureaucratic interference of government in their lives. They just want to get away from it. I know of doctors who have left their private practices because of all the bureaucratic regulations.

If you are a medical doctor and take Medicare, Medicaid, and Obamacare, there is a list of regulations that you have to follow across everything. You have to dot every I and cross every T. If you do not, you are going to end up in court, convicted, and in prison yourself. There are a lot of doctors who have said, “It’s not worth it. We’ll just leave. We’ll go do something else, or we’ll be hospital physicians. We’ll be something other than private physicians. We’re just leaving.” Engineers are the same way.

Any vocation that requires a license usually requires governmental regulation as well, and people are just fed up. Some of you have seen the headlines recently, reporting that over 60 percent of Americans hate—and that was the word they used—hate the government. Over 60 percent. That is quite interesting. There are plenty of people who have seceded vocationally, just like these priests and Levites. Likewise, many people today are leaving the political parties that have hogtied them for decades. Many are awakening to the very truth George Wallace stated in his 1968 presidential campaign: “There is not a dime’s worth of difference between the Democratic and the Republican parties.” People are just waking up to the reality of that.

As I was thinking about this, I thought we ought to have some bumper stickers. One slogan would be, “Secede—it’s the right thing to do.” Another might be, “Secede—it’s the right thing to do now.” Now. Indeed, a lot of people are trying to get out of the rat race.

What we need to learn is this: We need to learn to do without. We need to learn to sacrifice. We need to learn to be debt-free. We need to learn to be self-sufficient. We need to learn to read, study, and think for ourselves. We do not have to put up with wickedness and tyranny. There is a vocational and a political secession.

Personal and Religious Secession

Personal and Religious Secession: The Heart of the Matter

There is a personal and a religious secession. Look back in your Bibles to 2 Chronicles chapter 11, verse 14: “For the Levites left their suburbs and their possession, and came to Judah and Jerusalem: for Jeroboam and his sons had cast them off from executing the priest's office unto the LORD.” These priests and Levites left. Verse 16 says, “And after them”—that is, after they left—“out of all the tribes of Israel such as set their hearts to seek the LORD God of Israel came to Jerusalem, to sacrifice unto the LORD God of their fathers.”

Do you understand that secession begins on the lowest and most basic level, that of personal secession?

Many are able to leave a certain area, state, territory, or even a continent. I know people who have expatriated; they have left America and are now in foreign countries. Some have said they love it and would never consider coming back. They say there is far more liberty and freedom in some of those third-world countries than in America. These Levites and priests left the northern kingdom and came to the southern kingdom.

Many people are not able to secede physically. I am not able to go live in South America, and I have no desire to live there or anywhere else. If you were a multimillionaire, you could pretty well secede and go wherever you wanted. But although you may not be able to leave physically, you can personally drop out, drop off the radar, lay low,

and secede as much as is humanly possible. You do that by refusing to participate, cooperate, and validate tyranny and wickedness.

Just as many in Israel seceded from its perversions and idolatry, many are doing the same thing today. Do you realize that many Christians are leaving the mainline churches and denominations? There are denominations that not only allow women as pastors, but also allow sodomites as pastors and recognize sodomite marriage. How in the world can anyone preach and teach the whole Word of God in such a situation? It is impossible.

Moreover, you have to understand that there are many 501(c)(3) state churches. What is a 501(c)(3) state church? First, it is a church that is incorporated. Once a church incorporates, it basically denies Jesus Christ as head, because the state becomes the head of the church. The state demands certain things. If the church does not follow those demands, hold its annual meetings, pay its annual fees, and do what the state says, it can lose its incorporated status. It is just that simple. Once incorporated, the church applies to the IRS for 501(c)(3) tax-exempt status.

Now, let me explain something to you. Churches are tax immune because they are a separate jurisdiction. No church needs an IRS tax-exempt number to receive tax-deductible gifts. How can I say that? I am quoting IRS Publication 557: “Churches, although a church, its integrated auxiliaries, or a convention or association of churches, is not required to file Form 1023 to be exempt from federal income tax or to receive tax-deductible contributions. The organization may find it advantageous to obtain recognition of this exemption.” Really? Why would I find it an advantage to have the IRS say that I am exempt when I am already immune, and when it is already saying I do not need it? What many people do not understand is this: when you get your tax ID number, you have already compromised. IRS Publication 557 says that, to receive a tax-exempt number, one requirement—not all of them—is that “the practices and rituals associated with the organization's religious belief or creed are not illegal.”

You say, “I don't see anything wrong with that.” Well, add and finish the sentence. Agree that no belief or practice should be illegal—that is contrary to God's law—but let me finish it: “that the

practices and rituals associated with the organization's religious belief or creed are not illegal, or contrary to clearly defined public policy." Abortion is public policy. Sodomy is public policy. Socialism is public policy. Fascism is public policy. Once you sign on the dotted line to get your tax-exempt number, you're already saying, "I agree not to preach against public policy."

One author said it like this: "The truth is, incorporated churches are subject to total governmental control whom they may hire and what they may or may not teach or preach." Do you remember, I think it was here in Florida, a few years ago, a church fired an organist when they found out he was a sodomite? He sued the church. And that's happening all over this country.

Now the government is saying, "You can't discriminate. You have to have these people in there." I've heard people say, "Nobody's going to tell me what to preach." They already have, when you signed that you would not preach against clearly defined public policy. They cannot conflict with public policy, nor assault the hearer's sense of mental well-being, self-esteem, or sexual orientation.

The IRS prohibits such organizations from carrying on propaganda or otherwise attempting to influence legislation (26 U.S. Code 501(c)(3)). This prohibition extends not only to endorsing a political candidate, but also to other attempts to influence legislation, including taking a public stand against government-protected abominations such as abortion and homosexuality. No wonder many people are upset with mainline denominations and churches. Practically every week I receive a phone call from somewhere, and someone says, "But Brother Weaver, I cannot find a church in this area that preaches the gospel, that preaches the whole counsel of God, that preaches the truth. I can't do it."

Obviously, we have been commanded not to participate in idolatry. Everyone in this room can quote the first commandment: Exodus 20:3, "Thou shalt have no other gods before me." I shall have no other gods before me.

Look at Jeremiah 25:6: "And go not after other gods to serve them, and to worship them, and provoke me not to anger with the

works of your hands; and I will do you no hurt." God says, "You sin against me, I'll hurt you." Do you not remember that Scripture says our God is a jealous God? What does a father do to a son? He says, "Now son, don't do this. If you do this, I'm gonna whip you." That is exactly what our Heavenly Father says to us: "Don't do this or I'm gonna whip you."

I tell people that if every son could be whipped the way my father whipped me, we probably would have a whole different generation of men. My father had a philosophy: if you do it right, you don't have to do it often. He did it right, I can assure you. When God chastens us, when God whips us, according to Hebrews chapter 12, His chastening is always successful. He does it right to begin with. God says, "Don't do this and I won't whip you."

Now turn in your Bibles to 2 John. There is only one chapter there. I want to show you how God demands a personal and religious secession.

We must secede from those who are idolaters and those who refuse to worship, for we cannot commune with or support churches that deny Christ and His Word. Second John 6 says, "And this is love, that we walk after his commandments. This is the commandment, That, as ye have heard from the beginning, ye should walk in it. For many deceivers are entered into the world, who confess not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist."

John includes himself when he says, "Look to yourselves, that we lose not those things which we have wrought, but that we receive a full reward." He warns us to be careful. Verse 9 says, "Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son. If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine"—the doctrine of Christ—"receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed: for he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds." If merely entertaining one who denies Christ and His Word and bidding such an individual God speed brings a curse upon oneself and makes him a partaker of the evil deeds, how much worse is it to fellowship with people like that, call them Christians, and support them financially?

Here is a passage where God absolutely demands secession. It must be personal and religious. We cannot be partakers with evil. Secession is demanded; secession is biblical; and secession must begin on a personal and religious level. It may extend to a vocational and political level. It may also extend to an ecclesiastical level, to a state level, or to a national level. But the most basic and foundational form of secession is personal and religious. God commands it now.

The Strengthening Effect of Godly Secession and Conclusion

A godly and biblical secession strengthens a godly local government. If you have a decent, liberty-loving, God-fearing government, folks are going to flock there because people love liberty and want to worship God. So the Bible says in 2 Chronicles 11:17, “So they”—who's the they?

The priests, the Levites, and all the people that fled to Rehoboam—“so they strengthened the kingdom of Judah, and made Rehoboam the son of Solomon strong three years: for three years they walked in the way of David and Solomon.” Of course, later on Solomon sinned, and then he led the people into sin and rebellion as well. But the truth of the matter is, for three years, when they served God and did what was right, they were strengthened and built up.

It is not the wicked that encourage, develop, and work at establishing a godly and free society. It is the righteous. That is why Proverbs 28:28 says, “When the wicked rise, men hide themselves: but when they perish, the righteous increase.” That is why Proverbs 29:2 says, “When the righteous are in authority, the people rejoice: but when the wicked beareth rule, the people mourn.” It is not the wicked that seeks to establish a free and godly government full of liberty. It is the righteous.

And God demands that we secede from evil, wherever it is. If it is on a personal level, a familial level, an ecclesiastical level, a state level, or a national level, what did He say? “My son, walk not with them. Withdraw thy foot from them.” Secede; get out of the way. Secession is a biblical doctrine. You have to believe something about it because it is all through the Word of God.

Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we do ask for your grace and your mercy. We pray that you would teach us, build us up in the most holy faith, help us to understand this, Lord, and apply it to our hearts. Help us, Lord, to withdraw ourselves from evil and wickedness and anything and everything that is contrary to thee and thy word. We ask this in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord, in whose name we pray. Amen.

Now he said, You better be careful about this. Watch verse 9: "Whosoever transgresseth and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son." Watch: "If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine"—that is, the doctrine of Christ—"receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed: For he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds." Now, let me ask you a question: If merely entertaining one that denies Christ and His Word, and bidding such an individual God speed, brings a curse upon oneself and makes him a partaker of the evil deeds, how much worse is it to fellowship with people like that, call them Christians, and then support them financially?

Here is a passage where God absolutely demands secession. It has to be a personal and religious secession. We cannot be partakers with evil. Secession is demanded; secession is biblical. It must begin on a personal and religious level. It may extend to a vocational and political level, and it may also extend to an ecclesiastical, state, or national level. But the most basic and foundational form of secession is personal and religious. God commands it.

Look in 2 Chronicles chapter 11. A godly and biblical secession strengthens a godly local government. In other words, if you have decent liberty and local government, a God-fearing government, folks are going to flock there because people love liberty and want to worship God. The Bible says in 2 Chronicles 11:17, "So they"—the priests, the Levites, and all the people who fled to Rehoboam—"strengthened the kingdom of Judah, and made Rehoboam the son of Solomon strong, three years." For three years they walked in the way of David and Solomon. Of course, later on Solomon sinned, and then he led the people into sin and rebellion as

well. But for three years, when they served God and did what was right, they were strengthened, and it built up.

It is not the wicked that encourage, develop, and work at establishing a godly and free society. It is the righteous. That is why Proverbs 28:28 says, “When the wicked rise, men hide themselves: but when they perish, the righteous increase.” That is why Proverbs 29:2 says, “When the righteous are in authority, the people rejoice: but when the wicked beareth rule, the people mourn.” It is not the wicked that seeks to establish a free and godly government full of liberty; it is the righteous.

God demands that we secede from evil wherever it is: on a personal level, a familial level, an ecclesiastical level, a state level, or a national level. What did He say? “My son, walk not with them. Withdraw thy foot from them.” Secede; get out of the way. Secession is a biblical doctrine. You have to believe something about it because it is all through the Word of God. Let us pray.

Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we ask for your grace and mercy. Teach us, build us up in the most holy faith, help us understand this, Lord, and apply it to our hearts. Help us, Lord, to withdraw ourselves from evil and wickedness and anything and everything contrary to thee and thy word. We ask this in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord, in whose name we pray. Amen.

CHAPTER 24

Dead Letter Christians Or Word Only Christians

SCRIPTURE READING - 1 Thessalonians 1:1-10 (KJV)

Paul, and Silvanus, and Timotheus, unto the church of the Thessalonians which is in God the Father and in the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ. We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers; Remembering without ceasing your work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, in the sight of God and our Father.

Knowing, brethren beloved, your election of God. For our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance; as ye know what manner of men we were among you for your sake. And ye became followers of us, and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Ghost: So that ye were ensamples to all that believe in Macedonia and Achaia. For from you sounded out the word of the Lord not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith to

> God-ward is spread abroad; so that we need not to speak any thing. For they themselves shew of us what manner of entering in we had unto you, and how ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God; And to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come.

Introduction: The Problem with Christians and the Church

> I've been asked repeatedly as I travel across the country a simple question, one that you have probably asked several times: What in the world is wrong with Christians? Or ask another way, what is wrong with the church? I do not think that anyone would disagree with the fact that there are problems in most churches and there are problems among many professing Christians. We could use words to describe the average church and the average Christian such as apathetic, indolent, lethargic, sluggish, unconcerned, unprincipled, and unethical.

Word Only Christians Defined

I understand that there are exceptions, but usually this would apply to Christendom as a whole. In all probability, in some of those terms, we could also add unregenerate, unconverted, and unrepentant. I told you I was going to be preaching about word-only Christians, or dead-letter Christians.

The Apostle Paul said in verse 5, “For our gospel came not unto you in word only, but in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance.” Paul is thankful here that these Thessalonian believers did not receive truth in the Word only.

John the Apostle also deals with word-only professors: “Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him? My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth. And hereby we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before him. For if our heart

condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things. Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God."

Notice verse 16: "Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us." God the Father did not simply say, "I love you"; He sent His only begotten Son. Christ did not simply say, "I love you"; He laid down His life for us.

John argues that if we see our brother have need and shut up our bowels of compassion from him, how does the love of God dwell in us? We are not to love in word, neither in tongue, but in deed and in truth. If I see David hungry, I do not just say, "Well, brother, I'm going to be praying for you, and I trust the Lord to give you something to eat." If I have food, I share it with him and give it to him. It cannot be simply in word only; it has to be in our action and our conduct.

Love according to Scripture is always demonstrable. We do not tell our brothers or sisters, "Go in peace, be ye warmed and filled"; no, we simply take care of them. That is the way it is supposed to be scripturally. Unhappily, that is not the case with most churches, and it certainly is not the case with most Christians. Most professing Christians go merely upon their own way with the least bit, or I should say, without any concern, compassion, or compulsion.

The Danger of Religion Without the Holy Ghost

Nothing ever seems to bother them. Nothing ever seems to upset them. Why? The answer comes back because they are word-only professors. William Booth was the founder of the Salvation Army. I want to give you a quote, and I want you to listen to what William Booth said. I think he was very perceptive. He said, "The chief danger that confronts the coming century"—that is, our century—"will be religion without the Holy Ghost, Christianity without Christ, forgiveness without repentance, salvation without regeneration, politics without God, and Heaven without Hell." But I want you to note first of all that he said, religion without the Holy Ghost.

That is exactly where we are today. We have reduced Christianity to a ritual, to a ceremony, and to a sinner's prayer, with the Holy Spirit nowhere involved whatsoever. Millions of professing Christians have never been convicted by the Holy Spirit. They have never repented of their sins. All that has happened is that they have been led down a primrose path, and they think now that everything is settled for them right now, with a secured place in Heaven regardless of how they live and regardless of how they act. They are Word-only Christians.

When you stop and think, I know that the Holy Spirit is God; I know that He is omnipresent, that is, He is everywhere present at one time. Understand that. But if you were able to take the Holy Spirit out of the world today, tomorrow most churches would go right on as usual, and nothing would change, because we have everything reduced down to our program and our ceremonies.

Salvation Is of the Lord Alone

But the truth of the matter is this: A person's decision does not save them. A person's profession does not save them. Church membership does not save them. Baptism does not save them. Man cannot regenerate himself, nor can he repent of himself. Salvation is of the Lord.

In Mark chapter 10, our Lord gives the illustration of the rich young ruler. He comes running to Jesus Christ and says, "Good Master, what must I do that I may inherit eternal life?" Our Lord gives him a little rebuke: "Why callest thou me good? There is none good but one, that is, God." In other words, if I am good, then I am God. And if I am God, you do not come running into my presence demanding something of me. But our Lord said, "All right. You ask me, I'm going to answer."

"You know the commandments, Do not steal, Do not kill, Honor thy father and thy mother." The rich young ruler said, "All these things have I kept from my youth up: what lack I yet?" Our Lord said, "If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor, and come, follow me."

What happened? The Bible says the rich young man went away exceedingly sorrowful, for he had great riches. Now, here is my question: How many of you, when God saved you, sold everything that you had and gave to the poor? Not one. So why did our Lord tell this young man, "Sell everything you've got and give it to the poor and come follow me"? He was demonstrating that the young man had not kept the law of God, not even the first commandment: "Thou shalt have no other gods before me," because his money was his god. When he left, our Lord looked at His disciples and said, "How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God."

He said, "It is easier for a camel to go through an eye of a needle than it is for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of God." His disciples were astonished out of measure, saying among themselves, "Who then can be saved?" The question revolves around salvation. Jesus, looking upon them, saith, "With men it is impossible, but not with God: for with God all things are possible." With men, salvation is impossible. Man cannot save himself, nor can he save anyone else. Salvation is a work of God alone.

In 1 Thessalonians 1:5, Paul is thankful that when the Thessalonians were converted, their conversion was more than mere oratory, wisdom, or the cunning craftiness of men: “For our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost.” It was a real work of God with power and the Holy Ghost. The word power is the Greek word dunamis, from which we get our English word dynamite. He said they were converted like dynamite; they were blown up by the power of the Holy Spirit of God.

The Letter Kills, the Spirit Gives Life

We know that the Word of God is powerful in and of itself. Hebrews 4:12 tells us, “For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.” The Word of God is quick and powerful. However, we must remember that it is the Holy Spirit that makes the Word quick and powerful.

In 2 Corinthians 3:5-6, the Apostle Paul, speaking of himself and the other Apostles, says, “Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to

think any thing as of ourselves." It is not our oratory, our illustrations, or anything of us. "Our sufficiency is of God; Who also hath made us able ministers of the new testament; not of the letter, but of the spirit: for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life."

What does the letter of the Word of God do? It kills. That is why this message is titled "Dead Letter Christians or Word Only Christians." The power of the Holy Spirit makes the Word effectual and effective and gives it efficacy. Our Lord said something similar in John 6:63: "It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life." God's Word is powerful in and of itself, certainly powerful enough to condemn us; but unless the Holy Spirit makes it effective, all it does is condemn us.

In Isaiah 55:10–11, we see that God's Word never returns void, even if it is just the letter. God says, "For as the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater: So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it." God's Word will accomplish whatever He pleases, and it will prosper in the thing where He sent it.

The problem is that most people do not understand God's Word is not always sent for reconciliation. Sometimes it is sent for condemnation. In fact, years ago I preached a message on the ministry of condemnation. Look in 2 Corinthians chapter 2, beginning with verse 14. Paul says, "Now thanks be unto God, which always causeth us to triumph in Christ, and maketh manifest the savour of his knowledge by us in every place." He is thanking God that He always makes us triumph in Christ and makes manifest the savor, or smell, of His knowledge by us in every place. Now verse 15: "For we are unto God a sweet savour of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish: To the one we are the savour of death unto death; and to the other the savour of life unto life."

"And who is sufficient for these things?" Suppose you had a church building, or any building, with twenty lost people in it. If I, or anyone else, preached and the Holy Spirit of God convicted and

converted ten of them, making the Word effective and effectual in their lives, what has happened to the other ten who heard the same truth? They are now condemned.

There is therefore a ministry of condemnation and a ministry of reconciliation. Everyone who hears the Word of God is responsible to heed it. No one can escape that responsibility. It is the Word of God that will judge us in the last day. Our Lord said in John 12:48, "He that rejecteth me"—that is, the Living Word—"and receiveth not my words"—that is, the written word—"hath one that judgeth him in the last day, even the word which I have spoken. The same shall judge him in the last day." Everyone who hears will give an account to God.

If someone is a word-only Christian, or a dead-letter Christian, trusting only in his decision, his profession, his church membership, or his baptism, and thinking that the salvation he initiated will save him, he will face a very rude awakening on judgment day. Unless the Holy Spirit of God has worked powerfully in us, changing us and turning us from our sin unto the one true and living God, we are deceiving ourselves.

J. H. Merle d'Aubigné was a French Christian who wrote a wonderful set of books on the history of the Reformation. If you have never read any of them, I would encourage you to read the two books, The Reformation in England. Here is one quote that he gives.

He says this: “To believe in the power of man in the work of regeneration is the great heresy of Rome, and from that error has come the ruin of the Church. Conversion proceeds from the grace of God alone, and the system which ascribes it partly to man and partly to God is worse than Pelagianism.” Pelagianism is a pure, outright heresy. Pelagius taught that every man came into this world his own Adam. But when you talk about salvation being partly the work of God and partly the work of man, that is known as synergism, where man works together with God. All my life I heard preachers say, “When God has done His part, you’ve got to do your part.” Really? What can a dead man do? Scripture says that we are dead in trespasses and in sin. So d’Aubigné said this has been the curse of the Church.

One of the greatest American theologians was Charles Hodge. He died in 1878; d'Aubigné, by the way, died in 1872. Charles Hodge said, "No more soul-destroying doctrine could well be devised than the doctrine that sinners can regenerate themselves and repent and believe just when they please. As it is a truth both of scripture and of experience, that the unrenewed man can do nothing of himself to secure his salvation, it is essential that he should be brought to a practical conviction of that truth."

"When thus convicted, and not before, he seeks help from the only source from which it can be obtained." Of course, that would be God and God alone. As long as man thinks that he is okay and can initiate his own salvation, he is never going to seek God and His grace.

When you look back in 1 Thessalonians 1:5, Paul said, "For our gospel came not unto you in word only." What does the Apostle Paul mean when he talks about the gospel coming unto you in word only? In 1 Corinthians 2:1-5, Paul said, "And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God."

Paul said, "When I came to you, it was not my oratory, it was not my emotional appeal, it was not some ploy of man or man's wisdom." "For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified. And I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling." He continues, "And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power: That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God."

It was not great oratory, illustrations, emotional delivery, or exciting and enticing words. Paul did not want their faith to stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God. A great salesman can talk anyone into anything, and many preachers can talk people into making a decision and making a profession. Heart-wrenching emotional stories can make people cry, become upset, come forward, and make a profession or decision. But that does not mean the Holy Spirit has worked in their hearts. Paul wanted their faith to stand in the power of God, not in the wisdom of man.

In light of 1 Thessalonians, how can you be sure that you are not a word-only Christian? How can you be sure that you are a genuine Christian? What is in you that could only be there because of a supernatural work of God the Holy Spirit? What set the Thessalonian Christians apart and demonstrated that they were not word-only Christians, but were the elect of God?

The Three Evidences of Genuine Conversion

Look back in 1 Thessalonians chapter 1 and read verses 3 and 4. According to the text, there are three evidences that demonstrate that one is indeed a genuine child of God: a work of faith, a labor of love, and a patience of hope. “Remembering without ceasing your work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, in the sight of God and our Father; Knowing, brethren beloved, your election of God.” Paul says you can know that you are God’s elect. How can you know? Because of verse 3. Calvin said of this verse, “The statement should be explained to mean that Paul remembers their patience in hoping for the coming of Christ.”

From this we may gather a brief definition of true Christianity: that it is a faith that is lively and full of vigor, so that it spares no labor when assistance is to be given to one's neighbor. On the contrary, all the pious employ themselves diligently in the offices of love and lay out their efforts in them. Intent upon the hope of the manifestation of Christ, they despise everything else; and, armed with patience, they rise superior to the worrisomeness of the length of time, as well as all the temptations of the world. This is a good definition of what it means to be a real, genuine Christian. These three things deserve our attention one at a time.

Paul says, “Remembering without ceasing your work of faith.” I find it extremely interesting that the Apostle tells these Thessalonians, “You had a work of faith.” Is not faith the gift of God? Why is it now called your work of faith? Everyone can quote Ephesians 2:8-9, which the Apostle Paul wrote. He is certainly not going to contradict himself when he said, “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast.” Yet he calls it a work of faith, a

work of believers. How can faith be ascribed here to a work of believers when everybody knows that it is the gift of God?

Work of Faith: Turning from Idols

The answer is really simple. In Philippians 2:12-13, the Apostle tells us why it was called a work of faith of believers in 1 Thessalonians 1. He says, “Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.” Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. Then he says, “For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.”

So here is what the Apostle Paul said: God has worked it in you; now it is your responsibility to work it out. God works it in—that is His gift. We are to work it out, to exercise it, and it is called a work. It is not that we are earning it. It is not that we are meriting it.

It has already been given to us. It is a gift. So faith in is his gift. The exercise of that faith is my responsibility. God works it in; I must work it out. Let me put it to you very plainly: God may give you the gift of faith, but God is not going to believe for you. Repentance is God's gift, but God is not going to turn from sin for you. When God gives me faith and I exercise it, I am exercising the gift that God gave me. When I apply it, I am working out that which God gave me. When I turn from my sin, I am exercising the gift that God gave me.

We often forget that Ephesians 2:10 follows verses 8 and 9. The results, evidences, and manifestations of God's gift of faith are always seen in biblical terms of obedience. For He said, "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast." Verse 10 says, "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them."

Anytime God gives faith, there will be an exercise of it, and it will demonstrate and manifest itself in biblical works. A faith without works is dead. That is what James said: "If it hath not works, is dead, being alone. Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works."

Now go back to 1 Thessalonians chapter 1. Scripture always interprets Scripture. In verse 3, Paul says, "Remembering without ceasing your work of faith." Why is it called your work of faith? What was that work of faith? Skip down to verse 9. Paul explains it: "For they themselves shew of us what manner of entering in we had unto you, and how ye turned to God from idols."

That was their work of faith. They turned to God from idols with their whole hearts. It was not a half-baked turn, but that which was real and genuine and true. They forsook their idols and their false gods and turned wholly unto the Lord.

The forsaking of sin and idols is a work of faith. We confess and acknowledge that God is Sovereign, that He is the Supreme One, that He is Ultimate, that He is Absolute, that He is God alone, that He is the Lord and He is Savior. We acknowledge that He deserves all of our honor, worship, praise, and glory, and we turn from any and everything that is contrary to Him to Him. That is why it is called the work of faith. We actually forsake sins and idols and turn to Him, exercising the gift that He gave us.

Labor of Love: Serving the Living God

These Thessalonians not only had a work of faith. Look in verse 3: Paul says, "Remembering without ceasing your work of faith, and labour of love." What was their labor of love? Skip down to verse 9 again: "For they themselves shew of us what manner of entering in we had unto you, and how ye turned to God from idols." That was the work of faith. Here is the labor of love: "to serve the living and true God."

It is true that we fear God, yet it is also true that it is our love that motivates us to serve Him. Fear may hold Him in reverential awe, but love drives us to serve Him. How do we serve the one true and living God? Many answers could be given, and to a degree, probably most of them would be right. We could say that we serve Him by praying to Him, worshiping Him, tithing, giving gifts unto Him, and helping in the ministry. Yet the truth of the matter is that, if you really push this thing, God really does not need our service.

God does not need anything because He is God. He is already perfect and perfectly blessed in and of Himself. When someone says, “Oh, but He needs my love,” no, no, no, no. If God needs anything, then God is not God. You may say, “I need to give Him my money.” Yes, I believe in tithing, and I believe in giving gifts. But everything we have, He gave us, and He created everything that is.

If we understand that, we still have to ask: How do we serve Him? The Apostle Paul said, “Remembering without ceasing your work of faith and your labour of love.” To know how to serve Him, look in your Bibles to Hebrews chapter 6, verse 10. There he identifies a labour of love: “For God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love, which ye have shewed toward his name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister.” How do you serve God? By serving each other, by ministering to the saints. God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love which ye have shewed toward his name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister. We actually serve God by ministering to each other; when we minister to the saints of God, we minister to God.

Turn to Matthew 25. You probably remember this passage concerning the sheep and the goats. If you did not understand Hebrews 6:10, this makes it exceedingly plain. Beginning with verse 33: “And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left. Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the”

"Foundation of the world: For I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me. Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, and fed thee? or thirsty, and gave thee drink? When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? or naked, and clothed thee? Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee? And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me."

"Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels: For I was an hungred, and ye gave me no meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me not in: naked, and ye clothed me not: sick, and in prison, and ye visited me not. Then shall they also answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, or athirst, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto thee?" In other words, "Lord, if we had seen you, we'd have really done it to you." Then shall he answer them, saying, "Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me. And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal."

The way we serve God is by serving each other. We serve all the saints of God; when we do so, we are serving God.

Patience of Hope: Waiting for Christ

Paul said in Galatians 5:6, "For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision; but faith which worketh by love." How does faith work? By love. He also said in Galatians 5:13, "For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another." And in 1 John 5:2, "By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God, and keep his commandments."

These Thessalonian Christians had a work of faith and a labor of love. Their work of faith was turning from idols and turning from sin, and their labor of love was to serve the One True and the Living God. And how did they serve Him?

The third thing they had was a patience of hope. In 1 Thessalonians 1:3, Paul says, “Remembering without ceasing your work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, in the sight of God and our Father.” Our patience of hope is in the Lord Jesus Christ. It is found only in Him, in the sight of God and our Father.

We could say that patience of hope enables us to endure trials, tribulations, and persecutions while waiting for the end. I like the passage—and you will find it a number of times in Scripture—not a

whole verse, but simply the words, “And it came to pass.” It did not come to stay; it came to pass. I had sinus last week, and I am glad it came to pass. We have had family problems and financial problems, and they came to pass. If we patiently endure, they are going to pass, and we can be thankful.

Allowing Scripture to interpret Scripture, verse 9 explains the first two points in verse 3. Their work of faith was when they turned to God from idols. Their labor of love was to serve the one true and living God. But what is their patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ? Verse 10 says, “And to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come.”

When we wait patiently in hope, we are hopefully and patiently waiting for the accomplishment of God’s promises and God’s purpose. Counterfeit hopes give up, give out, quit, fail, and falter. The hope of every hypocrite shall perish. I have known people who said, “I’m going to hold out. I’m going to hold on. I’m not giving in. I’m not giving up.” And yet they do. Why? Because a Christian hope never fails, but a counterfeit hope does fail. I have known people who deserted the Christian faith. Some say, “Well, they just lost their salvation.”

No, not according to the Bible. According to the Bible, they never had it to begin with. John said in 1 John 2:19, "They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us." The proof that you have ever savingly believed is that you continue to believe. The proof that you have ever savingly repented is that you continue in repentance.

A counterfeit hope will give in, give up, and give out, but a Christian hope never will. Why? Here is why. Paul said in 1 Timothy chapter 1 and verse 1, "Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the commandment of God our Saviour, and Lord Jesus Christ, which is our hope." Our hope is Jesus Christ. He is God incarnate. He cannot fail. He will not fail. When Paul talks about a patient hope, it means that we are patiently waiting for God to accomplish all His promises and purposes in our life. Sometimes we want to help God—I sure want to at times—but God says, "I'm gonna work it out."

Albert Barnes, in his commentary on this verse, makes a tremendous observation: "Remembering without ceasing your work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ." And, "in the sight of God and our Father."

Our patience of hope in Jesus Christ is even in the sight of God our Father. Barnes said: "It is a hope which we have through the merits of the Redeemer, that is the Lord Jesus, and which we are permitted to cherish before God, that is in His very presence. When we think of God, when we reflect that we must soon stand before Him, we are permitted to cherish this hope. It is a hope which will be found to be genuine even in the presence of a holy and heart-searching God. This does not mean that it had been merely professed before God, but that it was a hope which they might dare to entertain in the presence of God and which would bear the scrutiny of His eye." What is our hope in standing before the judgment of God, who is all-knowing, all-powerful, and all-present? Our hope is that Jesus Christ is our Redeemer, and God is merciful and gracious to us because of the person and work of Jesus Christ.

We may hold on to that hope even in the presence of God. In verse 10, Paul said, “And to wait for his Son from heaven.” Waiting for Jesus Christ does not mean sitting idly by, twiddling our thumbs, and saying, “I hope he hurries up.” These Thessalonian Christians patiently waited for the Lord Jesus, yet note how active they were. In verses 6 through 8, Paul said, “And ye became followers of us, and of the Lord.” They obeyed, having received the word in much affliction, persecution, and joy in the Holy Ghost; they were examples to all that believed in Macedonia and Achaia.

They had godly, obedient lives. “For from you sounded out the word of the Lord not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith to God-ward is spread abroad; so that we need not to speak any thing.” Paul said that when they entered that area, they could not find anybody to preach to whom the Thessalonians had not already preached. That is patiently waiting. They were obedient, godly examples, preaching and teaching the Word of God. These Christians had an active faith, a laboring love, and a patient hope, enabling them to endure, persevere, and remain faithful to the end.

Application: Examine Yourselves

What is wrong with the church? What is wrong with most Christians? We have too many dead-letter and word-only professors in our churches—church members who have never been regenerated, convicted, or converted. They have never turned to God from idols or repented of their sins. Consequently, they are not interested in the Word of God or godly obedience, but only in entertainment, amusement, and personal satisfaction.

They know nothing of humility, lowliness of mind, or godliness. Hence, they seek preachers and pastors who will scratch their itching ears, tickle them, and entertain them. If every pastor in America preached and taught the Word of God as it is, including biblical regeneration, conversion, and repentance, half the church members would leave—or perhaps more than half. God gives us an illustration in the life of Ezekiel. Ezekiel was a priest whom God called to be a prophet, preaching to people already exiles in Babylon. In Ezekiel chapter 33 and verse 32, God tells Ezekiel, “Listen carefully.”

He said, "Thou art unto them as a very lovely song of one that hath a pleasant voice, and can play well on an instrument: for they hear thy words, but they do them not." To Ezekiel he said, "All you are is entertainment for them. They're not coming to hear the truth. They're coming to hear your oratory." There is nothing wrong with good oratory, but if you cut the entertainment out of most churches, they would be empty within a month.

Apply this to yourself: examine yourself. Paul said in 2 Corinthians 13:5, "Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?" Is there something in your life that can only be there because of the work of God the Holy Spirit? Is there something in your life that you could not have done in and of yourself? Have you really turned to God from idols? Have you really turned from your sin? Is there a real, genuine labor of love in your life to the saints of God, to the people of God, and to the things of God? Is there a patient hope that you have in Jesus Christ that will stand in the day of judgment?

Paul said it like this in 2 Timothy 1:12: "For the which cause I also suffer these things: nevertheless I am not ashamed: for I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day." Paul said, "I know whom I have believed. I am absolutely convinced that he is able to keep me." So Paul had a genuine hope.

Conclusion: Only the Holy Spirit Authenticates

There are dead letter Christians. There are word only Christians. And then there are those who have been powerfully convicted and converted by the Holy Spirit. In 1 Corinthians 12:3, the Apostle Paul says, "Wherefore I give you to understand, that no man speaking by the Spirit of God calleth Jesus accursed."

So if anybody curses Christ, mark her down, the Holy Spirit is not anywhere near him. Then he goes on to say, "and that no man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost." Let me explain it. You can stop any man on the street who has the ability to speak and move his tongue, and ask him, "Can you say Jesus is Lord?" He will look at you funny and say, "Yes, I can say that, Jesus is Lord."

Does that mean he is saved? No. He can say those words; he can mimic them. But the only way anyone can say savingly that Jesus Christ is Lord is by the power and efficacy of the Holy Spirit. Man may imitate, but only the Holy Spirit can authenticate. When He authenticates, we will always have a work of faith, a labor of love, and a patient waiting for our Lord Jesus Christ.

Because in Him we live and move and have our being. He is our all in all. Father, help us today to love Thee and submit to Thy Word. Convict, convert, and have Your blessed way in our lives. Lord, I pray for those who are word-only Christians and dead-letter Christians, wherever they may be, if they are hearing of my voice, that You would indeed be pleased to open their eyes and hearts, convict and convert them by Thy power and by the ministry of the Holy Spirit. In the name of Jesus Christ, we ask and pray. Amen.

CHAPTER 25

Will It Happen Again?

SCRIPTURE READING - Ezekiel 9:1-11 (KJV)

"He cried also at mine ears with a loud voice saying, Cause them to have charge over the city to draw near. Every man with this destroying weapon in his hand. Behold, six men came from the way of the higher gate, which lieth toward the north and every man, a slaughter weapon in his hand. And one man among them was clothed with linen. The other writers inkhorn by side. And they went in and stood by the brazen altar. And the glory of the God of Israel was going up from the cherub.

"Whereupon he was to the threshold of the house. And he called to the man clothed with linen, which had the writer's inkhorn by his side. And the Lord said to him, Go through the midst of the city, through the midst of Jerusalem and set a mark upon the foreheads of the men that sigh and cry for all the abominations that be done in the midst thereof. And to the others, he said in mine hearing, Go ye after him through the city and smite, let not your eyes spare neither have pity. Slay utterly old and young, both maids and little children and women, but come not near any man upon whom is the mark and begin at my sanctuary. Then they began at the ancient men which were

> before the house. And he said unto them, Defile the house and fill the courts with the slain. Go ye forth. And they went forth and slew in the city. And it came to pass while they were slaying them, and I was left, that I fell upon my face and cried and said, Ah, Lord God, wilt thou destroy all the residue of Israel in thy pouring out of thy fury upon Jerusalem."
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> "Then he said unto me, The iniquity of the house of Israel and Judah is exceedingly great, and the land is full of blood, and the city full of perverseness. For they say, The Lord hath forsaken the earth, and the Lord seeth not. And as for me also, mine eye shall not spare, neither will I have pity, but I will recompense their way upon their head. And behold, a man clothed with the linen, which had the inkhorn by his side, reported the matter, saying, I have done as thou hast commanded me."

It has been said that lightning does not strike twice in the same place. Of course, that is untrue. Lightning will strike as often as is necessary in the same place, as long as the Lord God sends it. As long as the Lord God wills it, it will strike a hundred times. If He so sends it, there are many other related judgments that you and I think about.

Introduction: The Question of Repeated Judgment

There are some states that have certain areas known as Tornado Alley. Other states have problems with hurricanes and earthquakes. If one survives some of these weather-related judgments, such as those that have destroyed cities in Kansas and Arkansas, one question that enters everyone's mind is, “Will it happen again?” In fact, we could ask that question regarding all of God's judgments. If we grasp the truth of God's immutability, we really do not need to ask that question. God does not change, and neither do His judgments against sin and rebellion. He is the same infinite, immutable, and holy God, and His righteous judgments are just and holy.

The Command to Destroy Jerusalem (Ezekiel 9:1-2)

They do not cease. The circumstances surrounding the judgments may differ, but their outcome and results are the same. In Ezekiel

chapter 9, God reveals to Ezekiel that He intends to destroy Judah and Jerusalem, along with the wicked in those areas. Verse 1 says, “He cried also in my ears with a loud voice saying, Cause them that have charge over the city to draw near even every man with his destroying weapon in his hand.” Verse 1 is extremely informative. He cried with a loud, or great, voice; the loud or great voice demonstrates the greatness of His indignation and the vehemence of His wrath, stirred up against the sins of the people. Thus, He is calling together the messengers of death and destruction. Those that have charge over the city in this context would refer either to angels or to the Chaldeans, into whose hands He has delivered the city. Notice that He said, “Cause them to have charge over the city to draw near. Every man with its destroying weapon in his hand. And behold, six men came from the way of the higher gate, which lieth toward the north.”

This command is issued from the temple court, where the temple was the place in which God revealed Himself to His people, both by mercy and judgment. The brazen altar was where the sacrifices were offered. The wicked had refused God's substitutional sacrifice for sin, and now they were going to be the sacrifice for their sins.

There is a principle clearly enunciated in Scripture: you must either have a substitute for your sins, a substitutional sacrifice, or you must pay the penalty yourself. Since wicked Judah and Jerusalem had rejected God's sacrifice, they became the sacrifice to God's righteous judgment. When God's righteous judgment strikes, there is no room for mercy.

No Mercy at the Altar: The Principle of Substitution

Joab is an excellent illustration. Joab was David's captain and also a murderer; he murdered two men in cold blood. When it came time for Joab to die, he ran into the tabernacle and caught hold of the horns of the altar. First Kings chapter 2, verses 28 through 31, says: "Then tidings came to Joab, for Joab had turned after Adonijah, though he had not turned after Absalom. And Joab fled into the tabernacle of the Lord and caught hold of the horns of the altar. And it was told King Solomon that Joab was fled into the tabernacle of the Lord, and behold, he is by the altar."

"Then Solomon sent Benaiah, the son of Jehoiada, saying, Go, fall upon him. Benaiah came into the tabernacle of the Lord and said to him, Thus saith the king, Come forth. And he said, Nay, but I will die here. And Benaiah brought the king word again, saying, Thus said Joab. And thus he answered me. And the king said to him, Do as he said. Fall upon him and bury him. That thou mayest take away the innocent blood, which you have shed for me and the house of my father."

Joab was in the tabernacle, holding onto the horns of the brazen altar, but no mercy was shown to him. When God's judgment comes, it is not a time for mercy; it is a time for judgment and sacrifice.

The Identity of the Six Men and the Man with the Inkhorn

In Ezekiel 9:2 we read: “And behold, six men which came from the way of the higher gate which lieth toward the north, and every man a slaughter weapon in his hand. And one man among them was clothed with linen and with a writer's inkhorn by his side, and they went and stood beside the brazen altar.” Who were these six men armed with destroying weapons? There are two varying views concerning exactly who these individuals were.

Some scholars point out that these six individuals were representatives of the Babylonian army whom God had ordained to destroy Judah and Jerusalem. One of them was Adam Clarke, who wrote, “By those six men with destroying weapons, the Chaldeans are represented who had received commission to destroy the city.” When the north is mentioned in such cases, he said, the Chaldean and the Chaldean armies are generally intended.

Clarke observed that there appeared to have been six men with a sort of slaughter bill and one man with an inkhorn. These may represent the seven counselors of the Eastern monarchs, who always saw the king's face and knew all the secrets of the government. One of them was the minister who had the Office of Reporting Concerning Criminals, carrying the Book of Death and the Book of Life into the presence of the king. In those books were entered the criminals destined to suffer and those considered innocent or recommended to mercy. The former were in the Book of Death, and

the latter in the Book of Life. The person with the inkhorn might be termed, in our phrase, the recorder. Thus Adam Clarke understood the six men to be representatives of the Babylonians.

Interestingly, Jeremiah 39:3 lists six princes of the king of Babylon who sat in the middle gate: Nergal-Sharezer, Samgar-Nebo, Sarsechim, Rab-Saris, Nergal-Sharezer, and Rab-Mag, with all the residue of the princes of the king of Babylon. Six are particularly mentioned. Other commentators and scholars, however, say that these six men were six angels.

I probably agree with this interpretation. When you consider that one angel, in one night and with one stroke of the sword, killed 185,000 Assyrian soldiers, I do not imagine six angels would have too much trouble with Judah and Jerusalem.

But listen carefully to what Matthew Henry says, because he presents the position that these six men are angels: "There are those that have charge of the city destroyed, not the Chaldean armies. They are indeed employed in this work, but they are not the visitors. They are only the servants or the tools. God's angels have received a charge now to lay the city waste, which they had long had a charge to protect and watch over. They are at hand as destroying angels, as ministers of wrath. Every man has his destroying weapon in his hand, like the angel that kept the way of the tree of life with a flaming sword."

Henry continues: "They went in and stood beside the brazen altar, on which the sacrifices were offered and atonement made. When they acted as destroyers, they acted as sacrificers, not from personal revenge or ill will, but with a pure and sincere regard to the glory of God. For, to His justice, all they slew were offered up as victims. They stood by the altar, as it were, to protect and vindicate it, plead its righteous cause, and avenge its horrid profanation."

"They were to receive their commission to destroy, to intimate that the iniquity of Jerusalem, like that of Eli's house, was not to be purged by sacrifice." Certainly Henry is right. Either one offers an acceptable sacrifice to God as He demands, or one becomes the sacrifice to His righteous wrath and judgment. Psalm 118:27 says, "God is the LORD, which hath shewed us light: bind the sacrifice

with cords, even unto the horns of the altar." Here, then, are six angels, in all probability, who have come from God with a bill of destruction against Judah and Jerusalem.

Why did God deal so horrendously with Judah and Jerusalem? Jeremiah states it in Lamentations 4:5: "For the punishment of the iniquity of the daughter of my people is greater than the punishment of the sin of Sodom that was overthrown in a moment and no hand stayed on her." Thus, Jeremiah says that the destruction of Judah and Jerusalem was greater than the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. Certainly, the greatness of their sins and the greatness of their responsibility demonstrated the greatness of their culpability and therefore demanded a greater punishment. Judah and Jerusalem not only had the law of God; they had the tabernacle of God, the worship of God, and, later, the temple of God.

Look with me in Ezekiel chapter 8, and let me show you that which provoked the Lord so horribly. Before we look at Ezekiel chapter 8, let me say that we do not want to mimic these provocations. Unhappily, I do believe this, and I am afraid of this: most professing Christians are engaging in the exact same provocations that Judah and Jerusalem engaged in.

The Sins That Provoked Judgment (Ezekiel 8)

If we continue to do so, the question has to be asked, Will it happen again? You ask me, What will happen again? My answer is, Hold on, wait and see. Let us look in Ezekiel chapter 8 and see that which provoked the Lord to destroy Judah and Jerusalem. Let us read the first five verses: "And it came to pass in the sixth year and in the sixth month, in the fifth day of the month, as I sat in my house and the elders of Judah sat before me that the hand of the Lord God fell upon me."

"Then I beheld and lo a likeness as the appearance of fire from the appearance of his loins, even downward fire and from his loins, even upward as the appearance of the brightness as the color of amber. And he put forth the form of a hand, and took me by the lock of mine head. And the Spirit lifted me up between the earth and the heavens, and brought me into the visions of God to Jerusalem, to the door of the inner gate that looketh toward the north."

"Where was the seat of the image of jealousy, which provoked a jealousy? And behold, the glory of the God of Israel was there, according to the vision that I saw in the plain. Then said he unto me, Son of man, Lift up thine eyes now the way toward the north. So I lifted up mine eyes the way toward the north and behold the northward at the gate of the altar, this image of jealousy at the entry." Now, God states that there at the gate was the seat of the idol. We do not know exactly what idol this was. It could have been an image of Baal, which, of course, Manasseh had put in the temple, or it could also have been an image of Mars or Tammuz or Adonis. We are not told exactly what that image or altar was. What we are told is that it was an image of jealousy, provoking to jealousy. Whatever this was, it was in plain absolute view of everyone.

The reality presented here is that the entire country was given over to idolatry. They had apostatized and left the true worship of Jehovah. The idol was located at the door of the inner gate for everyone to see. They were unashamed in their sin and rebellion. The very first thing we have is open idolatry, open apostasy, but it gets worse.

Let us look at verse 7, beginning with verse 7. Well, let us read verse 6: "He said, therefore to me, Son of man, seest thou what they do. Even the great abominations at the house of Israel committed the year that I should go far off from my sanctuary, but turn thee yet again and thou shalt see greater abominations."

The open idol was bad enough, but now here is something greater: "And he brought me to the door of the court, and when I looked, behold, a hole in the wall. Then he said unto me, Son of man, dig now in the wall, and when I had digged in the wall, behold, a door. And he said unto me, Go in and behold the wicked abominations they do here. So I went in and saw, and behold, every form of creeping things, an abominable beast, and all the idols of the house of Israel, portrayed upon the wall round about and there stood before them 70 men of the ancients of the house of Israel and in the midst of them stood Jaazaniah the son of Shaphan and every man his censer in his hand and the thick cloud of incense went up then said he unto me son of man hast thou seen what the ancients of the house of Israel do in the dark every man in the chambers of his

imagery but they said for they say the Lord seeth not The Lord hath forsaken the earth."

God says that open apostasy is bad, but He is going to show something even greater. Adam Clarke comments on this passage when he sees all of these things painted on the wall: "Then I went in and saw and behold every form of creeping things and abominable beast and all the idols of the house of Israel portrayed upon the wall roundabout."

It is very likely that these images portrayed on the wall were the objects of Egyptian adoration: the ox, the ape, the dog, the crocodile, the Ibis, the Scarabeus or the beetle, and various other things. It appears that these were privately worshipped by the Sanhedrin, or Jewish council, consisting of 70 or 72 persons, six chosen out of every tribe as representatives of the people. The images were portrayed upon the wall, as we find those ancient idols on the walls of the tombs of the kings and nobles of Egypt.

Here you have this open idol and open apostasy. Now you have everyone worshiping, basically, the leaders openly—or, rather, secretly—all of the abominations of Egypt. Look at verse 12. This is exceedingly important: "Then said he unto me, Son of man, hast thou seen what the ancients of the house of Israel do in the dark?"

Now we are talking about the leaders, the elders, every man in the chambers of his imagery. "For they say, The Lord seeth not; the Lord hath forsaken the earth." What is every man doing in the chambers of his imagery? You remember that the word image comes from imagination. A hole was dug into the wall, a door was discovered, and that door led to the chambers of a man's imagery—that is, to what he actually held in his mind and heart. These leaders of Israel were not willing to do openly what they were willing to do secretly.

In other words, their profession did not match their lives. Let me put it like this: they were first-rate hypocrites. They professed that they were the people of God, but they lived something totally different. They were different in private from what they were in public. Does that ring a bell? Does that make you think of our modern-day politicians? The hypocrisy of our modern-day politicians is exposed here as well. Do you realize that practically all

politicians, with the exception of the Muslims and the Jews, profess to be Christians?

Yet the truth of the matter is that they work against the very faith they profess to believe. They pass laws absolutely contrary to God and His Word, eagerly do so, and then have the audacity to defend their actions by humanistic rationale. So it was with the leaders of Judah and Jerusalem. We must realize that as a man thinks in his heart, so he acts and conducts his business in reality; that is what he is. As Proverbs 23:7 says, "As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he." Our Lord said plainly in Matthew 7:20, "Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them." Here is this open apostasy. Here is the seat of the idol, but here is what everyone is really doing in the chambers of his imagination. Their thoughts are absolutely contrary to Me. They profess one thing, but act entirely differently.

Now note that our Lord lists an even greater abomination in verses 13 and 14: "He said also unto me, Turn thee yet again, and thou shalt see greater abominations that they do. Then he brought me to the door of the gate of the Lord's house, which was toward the north; and, behold, there sat women weeping for Tammuz." I do not want to get into all of this absolutely pagan worship.

There is certainly an application here. I want to give you two brief quotations by two commentators, Matthew Poole and Albert Barnes, concerning the worship of Tammuz. Matthew Poole hits the nail on the head:

"'There sat women,' contrary to the law were they come hither, led by their blindest, because the vilest and most impudent superstition, and waiting—that is expressed by city sitting—ready to commit most lewd wickedness as part of their obscene and beastly rites. Weeping: This is only the part which is specified of their irreligious religion, commemorating with tears an infamously lustful and unclean whoremonger or virginary of Venus snatched from her by an unhappy wound of a boar; said that sometime this weeping implies all the beastly rites of that idol."

What you are talking about here in the worship of Tammuz is not only sex worship, but prostitution and everything connected with it. Albert Barnes says:

"This was a revival of nature worship under another form. The death of Adonis, who was snatched from her, symbolized by the suspension of the productive powers of nature, which were in due time revived. Accordingly, the time of this festival was at the summer solstice. When in the east nature seems to wither and die under the scorching heat of the sun, to burst forth again into life in the due season. At the same time, there was a connection between this and the sun worship, in that the decline of the sun and the decline of nature might be likened, like represented by the death of Adonis. The excitement attended upon these extravagances of alternate wailing and exaltation were in complete accordance with the character of nature worship, which for this reason was so popular in the East, especially with women, and led by inevitable consequences to unbridled license and excess."

"Such was, in Ezekiel's day, one of the most detestable forms of idolatry." These women were sitting where they were not even supposed to be, because that particular place was reserved for the rulers and the princes. They were weeping for that stupid idol, or for what the idol represented. Contrast Ezra and Daniel: they wept for the national sins of their people. Here these women were weeping for that idol or for what the idol represented.

Do you realize we have exactly the same thing today? You say, "Brother Weaver, I've never heard of anyone today worshiping Tammuz." You have to remember that this is an aspect of nature worship. In environmentalism today, a baby eagle is worth far more than a human baby. You can murder a human baby, but you had better not touch a baby eagle, or you will spend forty years in prison. Environmentalism thinks about trees, Mother Earth, and nature. In environmentalism, all these are accorded a higher worship than the one true and living God. I have actually seen a bumper sticker that said, "Trees have feelings too."

You talk about a tree hugger? I saw one sign I really liked: "There's nothing wrong with hugging a tree, as long as you're getting to your deer stand." That is a little different from environmentalism, but it demonstrates the point: nature is accorded a higher position than God Himself. Recently, a leading feminist was pregnant with a male child, and she had her baby murdered, aborted. Here is what

she said: “I was not going to bring another monster into the world.” She was a feminist, and if it was a man, it was a monster. That same woman probably would cry at a baby beached whale and shed great tears because a baby whale is dying. Yet there are no tears for an aborted baby.

Paganism always exalts nature and ignores the God of nature. It is strange, as well as an abominable thing, that many will choose to serve an idol with tears when they refuse to serve the one true and living God with joy and gladness of heart.

Now look at Ezekiel 8:16. Here is the final abomination: “And he brought me into the inner court of the Lord’s house, and, behold, at the door of the temple of the Lord, between the porch and the altar, were about five and twenty men, with their backs toward the temple of the Lord, and their faces toward the east; and they worshipped the sun toward the east.”

Notice that they were in the inner court. No one but the priests could enter the inner court. There were about five and twenty men. Do you remember how many courses of priests there were? Twenty-four, with the high priest over each one. Each course had a priest over it. So here you have all twenty-five of the Lord’s priests worshiping the sun.

They had their backs toward the West; God's altar was in the West. So they were worshiping the sun. The worship of the sun and other heavenly bodies was part of the earliest idolatries and was repeatedly condemned in Scripture.

Deuteronomy 17, verse 2, says: "If there be any found among you with any of the gates which the Lord thy God giveth thee, man or woman, that hath wrought wickedness in the sight of the Lord thy God, in transgressing his covenant, hath gone and served other gods, and worshipped them, either the sun, or moon, or any of the host of heaven, which I have not commanded. And it be told thee, and thou hast heard it and inquired diligently, and behold, it be true, and the thing certain, that such abomination is wrought in Israel. Then shall thou bring forth that man and that woman which have committed that wicked thing under thy gates. Even that man or that woman, thou shalt stone them with stones till they die."

Worshiping the sun and the moon was such an abomination.

In Job 31, Job speaks of his suffering while holding on to his righteousness. He says that he had done nothing to deserve the judgment he was facing. One thing he mentions is this: “If I beheld the sun when it shined or the moon walking in brightness, and my heart had been secretly enticed, or my mouth has kissed my hand, this also were iniquity to be punished by the judge, for I should have denied the God that is above.”

Notice that Job is speaking of the worship of the sun and the moon. If he had done this, he says, then he had denied the God who is above.

As we read through Ezekiel 8, we find that the people were involved and engaged in idolatry. The princes were engaged in idolatry, and the priests were engaged into idolatry. In fact, idolatry had pretty well swept over the entire area. Very few had not bowed to some idol.

God says in Ezekiel 22: “There is a conspiracy of her prophets in the midst thereof, like a roaring lion ravening the prey. They devoured souls. They have taken the treasure and precious things. They have made her many widows in the midst thereof.” Her prophets were no good.

“Her priests have violated my law and have profaned mine holy things. They have put no difference between the holy and profane, neither they show difference between the unclean and the clean. And have hid their eyes from my sabbaths, and I am profane among them.” The priests were guilty. “Her princes in the midst thereof are like wolves ravening the prey to shed blood and destroy souls to get dishonest gain.”

The prophets had “daubed them with untempered mortar, seeing vanity, and divining lies unto them, saying thus saith the Lord God, when the Lord hath not spoken.” The people of the land had used oppression, exercised robbery, vexed the poor and needy, and oppressed the stranger wrongfully. So God lists the prophets, the priests, the princes, and the people.

Everyone is totally consumed with apostasy and idolatry. Go back to Ezekiel chapter 8 and see God's attitude toward this apostasy, this

turning from Him and His law. Verses 17 and 18 say, "Then He said unto me, Hast thou seen this, O son of man? Is it a light thing to the house of Judah, that they commit the abominations which they commit here? For they have filled the land with violence, and have returned to provoke me to anger, lo, they put the branch to their nose. Therefore will I also deal in fury, mine eyes shall not spare, neither will I have pity, and though they cry in my ears with a loud voice, yet will I not hear them."

The Marking of the Faithful and the Slaughter (Ezekiel 9:3-7)

Now we have arrived at chapter 9. In verse 1, God calls for men with the destroying weapons in their hand. When you get to Ezekiel chapter 9, judgment has come. Full judgment has come. God graciously and mercifully marked the few who sighed and cried for the abominations of the country. Verses 3 and 4 say, "And the glory of the God of Israel was gone up from the cherub whereupon he was to the threshold of the house. And he called to the man clothed with linen, which had the writer's inkhorn by his side. And the Lord said unto him, Go through the midst of the city, through the midst of Jerusalem and set a mark upon the foreheads of the men that sigh and that cry for all the abominations to be done in the midst thereof."

God said, Go over there and pick out all of those who are upset with this apostasy, idolatry, wickedness, and corruption. Put a mark on their heads. After these are marked, the awesome and terrifying destruction begins. Verse 5 says, "And to the others, he said in my hearing, Go ye after him through the city and smite. Let not your eyes spare. Neither have you pity. Slay utterly old and young, both maids and little children and women, but come not near any man upon whom is the mark, and begin at my sanctuary. Then they begin at the ancient men which were before the house."

Those elders watched. Verse 7 says, "Defile the house and fill the courts with the slain." Those were the wicked priests. "Go ye forth. And they went forth and slew in the city."

God says, “I want you to slay everybody who doesn't have the mark.” Look at verse 5: “And to the others, he said in mine hearing,

Go ye after him through the city and smite. Let not your eyes spare. Neither have ye pity." There is no mercy shown: "slay utterly old and young, both maids and little children and women, but come not near any man upon whom is my mark." Although there was no mercy or pity to be given, God is saying that the time for repentance and forgiveness is past. The only thing that remains now is judgment.

There is one question here that is clearly answered for us. You never have to guess: where did this judgment begin? Look at verse 6: "Slay utterly old and young, both maids and little children and women, but come not near any man upon whom is the mark and begin at my sanctuary." Does that passage ring a bell for you?

Judgment Begins at the House of God (1 Peter 4:17-18)

Peter says, "For the time has come that judgment must begin at the house of God. And if it first began in us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God? And if the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?" Judgment must begin at the house of God. If it began with us, what shall be the end of them that obey not the gospel of God?

Go back to Ezekiel 9 and look at verse 8. What did Ezekiel say? "And it came to pass, while they were slaying them, and I was left, I fell upon my face." I have news for you: if God graciously spared me, I would be falling on my face as well. But that is what he is saying. Judgment now must begin at the house of God. And if the righteous scarcely be saved, what are the world's going to happen to the wicked in the ungodly?

Modern America's Parallel Sins

I want you to pause and contemplate a very serious thought. As a professing Christian people and a professing Christian nation, we have apostatized from the truth. In this nation, we seek an easy religion and a superficial salvation. We want to be saved from the penalty of our sins while we revel in and glory in our sins. We wish to be entertained, coddled, comforted, and pampered. We have no desire as a nation to be biblical, obedient, holy, or righteous. We as a nation have become unjust, unrighteous, and unholy in every sphere of life and in our government.

We have forsaken God and His Word socially, economically, ecclesiastically, governmentally, and individually. We are in rebellion and disobedience up to our eyeballs. We are committing the same sins that Judah and Jerusalem committed. So my question is, will it happen again?

You say, "Wait a minute, Brother Weaver. Hang on. I'm not worshiping the sun. I'm not falling down to some idol. I'm not worshiping Tammuz." Really? You're not an idolater?

I want you to turn in your Bibles to Colossians chapter 3. I hope you understand: you cannot violate any of the Ten Commandments until you have violated the first commandment, "Thou shalt have no other gods before me." Think about this. Look in Colossians chapter 3, verses 5 and 6: "Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, and uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence." And "covetousness, which is idolatry: for which things' sake the wrath of God cometh on the children of disobedience."

Did you notice that he said, "covetousness, which is idolatry"? When we place our desires, lusts, and love upon things other than the Lord, it is idolatry. When we place material possessions ahead of worship and obedience to God, it is idolatry. When we refuse to order our thoughts in accord and agreement with the Word of God, it is idolatry. When we place ourselves, our wants, and our wills ahead of God, His Word, and His truth, it is idolatry.

We may not bow down to a physical idol, but we oftentimes submit and bow down to the idol of self. We want what we want; we want to please ourselves and satisfy and gratify our flesh, no matter whether it flies in the face of God's Word. Do you realize that all adultery is idolatry? All theft is idolatry. All murder is idolatry. Any violation of God's law is idolatry, because you cannot disobey God without first enthroning yourself. You make self an idol. Such is idolatry—the abominable thing which God hates.

Applications: God's Wrath, False Security, and the Need for Repentance

That is why I ask this question: Since we are committing exactly the same sins that Judah and Jerusalem committed, will it happen again? Will God send His destroyers upon us? Will our society, our nation, and our people be destroyed? You must remember that God is immutable. He does not change, and neither do His judgments. We have to learn the truth of Hebrews 10:31: “It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.” It is even more fearful when that living God is angry with you. I think the question I ask is a very legitimate one in light of our apostasy: Will it happen again?

First of all, if you understand Ezekiel 9:1, you understand this: God has ministers of wrath at His call and disposal. Those ministers are always within His call, and they come with invisible powers by whom He accomplishes His purposes.

It should be noted that those who make God their enemy also make His messengers their enemy. It does not bode well for those who fight against God, nor does it bode well for those who fight against His messengers. Instead of fighting, we need repentance.

We have fallen into the same trap that Israel fell into. Israel depended upon the fact that they had Abraham as their father. Abraham was the friend of God. Does that give us something on which to rest and say, “Look at the faith of our founding fathers”?

Most of you know that our founding fathers were Christian. The few who were not Christians were deeply influenced by the Christian faith. And I have news for you: Even Benjamin Franklin, who is accounted a deist, if you read his writings, has far more theology and expresses a far greater faith than most professing Christians today. It was Benjamin Franklin who called for prayer at the Constitutional Convention. He said that if a sparrow cannot fall to the ground without your heavenly Father, how much less can a nation arise without Him?

Obviously, he believed in God’s sovereignty. He may not have been a Christian, but those who were not Christians were deeply influenced by the Christian faith. Benjamin Franklin and George Whitefield were friends, and Franklin always went to hear

Whitefield preach. Franklin figured that approximately 25,000 people could hear Whitefield preach without any type of amplification or megaphones.

SCRIPTURE READING - Ezekiel 33:24-28 (KJV)

> I want to show you, in Ezekiel chapter 33. Let's begin reading verse 24. We're depending on our founding fathers, just like Israel depended upon Abraham. "Son of man, they that inhabit those wastes of the land of Israel speak, saying, Abraham was one, and he inherited the land; but we're many. The land has given us for inheritance. It's ours."
>
> "Wherefore saying to them, now watch the set, the Lord God, you eat with the blood, and lift up your eyes towards your idols, and shed blood. And shall you possess the land? You stand upon your sword. You work abomination. You defile everyone, his neighbor's wife. And shall you possess the land? Say thou thus unto them, Thus saith the Lord God, As I live, surely they that are in the wastes shall fall by the sword."

"And him that is in the open field will I give to the beast to be devoured, and they in the forts and in the caves shall die the pestilence: for I will lay the land most desolate, and the pomp of her strength shall cease; and the mountains of Israel shall be desolate, that none pass through it."

It did not help them to be descendants of Abraham or friends of the Friend of God. And it will not help us to know that we had a godly foundation. We have spent it.

Thirdly, in Ezekiel chapter 8, there comes a time when God will not hear cries for mercy. That is a frightening truth, and yet it is clearly revealed in Ezekiel 8:18: "Therefore will I also deal in fury. Mine eye shall not spare, neither will I have pity. And though they cry in mine ears with a loud voice, yet will I not hear them."

Ezekiel 9:10 states: "And as for me also, mine eyes shall not spare, neither will I have pity, but I will recompense their way upon their head."

The truth is this: if one does not seek the Lord in a state of mercy and grace, and does not hear God in the time of mercy and grace,

God will not hear him in the time of judgment. Isaiah 55:6-7 states: "Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near: let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon."

If you seek God while he may be found, turn from your wicked ways, and obey him, there is mercy. But if you do not turn from your wicked ways and do not seek him in a time of grace and mercy, then in the time of judgment he will not hear you. Will it happen again? God said.

And Ezekiel 9 says, “Begin at my sanctuary.” He said in 1 Peter 4, “the time has come that judgment must begin at the house of God.” If the righteous scarcely be saved—or, as Job said, if we make it by the skin of our teeth—if God spares us in his mercy, what in the world will the end of the ungodly and the wicked be? I do not want to be with the wicked and the ungodly and find out. I want to be like Ezekiel. When I learn that I was spared, I want to fall on my face and say, “Thank you, Father. Thank you for grace and mercy.”

Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we bow to thee. We thank you for your word and your truth. Lord, help us seriously consider the state of our nation and order our lives accordingly, that we, like Ezekiel, may be spared if and when it happens again. Give us grace to serve thee acceptably with reverence and godly fear. In thy name we pray. Amen.

Source Notes

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